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**Suicide Narratives in Contemporary Mexico:  
A Transmedial Perspective**

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**“No one controls your destiny.  
Even at the very worst - there is always choice”**  
- *Gregory Maguire (2011).*

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## **Abstract**

Suicide remains a significant public health concern globally, as acknowledged by the World Health Organization (WHO). In Mexico, rates of suicide attempts and completed suicides have shown a steady increase over the past two decades, reaching alarming levels exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing socio-economic challenges. This concerning trend underscores the need for comprehensive strategies to address the issue. The media's influence in shaping societal perceptions and behaviours cannot be understated, particularly concerning sensitive topics like suicide. Studies have highlighted the “Werther effect”, suggesting that media portrayals of suicide can potentially trigger imitative behaviours. Consequently, this thesis endeavours to examine how different forms of media in Mexico, depict suicide and mental health to ascertain whether such representations contribute to imitative behaviours or serve as effective prevention mechanisms. The methodology involves analysing fictional stories, such as movies, series, and soap operas, to understand their representations of suicide, as well as scrutinizing news coverage to assess adherence to WHO recommendations regarding responsible reporting on suicide. By examining both fictional and news media, the study aims to provide insights into the impact of diverse media forms on perceptions of suicide and mental health among young people, who are increasingly exposed to media content through technological advancements and social networks. Understanding the alignment of media representations with WHO guidelines is crucial for developing targeted prevention strategies that leverage the media's potential as a tool for positive change.



## Introduction

The issue of suicide is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon that affects all nations worldwide, impacting individuals of all ages. In a context where mental health is becoming increasingly crucial, suicide has become a global public health concern, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Every year, approximately 703,000 people lose their lives to suicide, and for each completed case, it is estimated that there are at least 20 attempts. These figures underscore the urgent need to address this problem.

Despite efforts to address this issue, numerous challenges persist, from stigma and silence in some societies to the quality of collected data, which may underestimate the true magnitude of the problem. It is essential to thoroughly understand this phenomenon to develop more effective prevention strategies and raise awareness of factors that may influence suicidal behaviour. Consequently, understanding this phenomenon has been the subject of study for years, with the aim of developing more effective prevention strategies and raising awareness of factors that may influence suicidal behaviour. Although some regions have managed to reduce suicide rates, the Americas, including Mexico, have experienced a steady increase in recent decades, exacerbated by sociocultural factors and the mental health crisis associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It is concerning to note that among the young population, aged 15 to 29, suicide has become the fourth leading cause of death, with men being the highest-risk group.

The media plays a crucial role in disseminating information and culture, which can both help and harm in addressing suicide. There has been extensive research on whether media messages can generate an imitative effect, known as the "Werther effect," as well as whether they can be used as prevention tools. Additionally, access to information through new technologies and digital media has also significantly influenced the perception and understanding of suicide.

In this context, there arises the need to understand how suicide stories are narrated in Mexico. This study adopted a methodology in which various media were analysed, such as

soap operas, anthology series, movies, and songs for fictional stories; while for real news, 30 news stories from different Mexican media outlets were collected and their content analyzed to determine if they followed WHO recommendations when reporting a suicide. The purpose was to evaluate how stories related to suicide are addressed in these media, and whether there is a tendency to romanticize them or if, on the contrary, they follow the recommendations established by the World Health Organization.

The thesis will be structured into three distinct chapters. To elucidate this theme comprehensively, Chapter 1 consists of an exhaustive exploration of the role of storytelling in shaping and disseminating cultural ideas and practices. Through diverse theoretical frameworks, including limited effects, uses and gratifications, critical theory, and symbolic interactionism, among others, the analysis traces the evolution of communication studies and their contemporary understanding of their impact on belief and value transmission. Additionally, it delves into how storytelling techniques can effectively shape these influences, providing an updated understanding of the interplay between communication and culture.

Chapter 2 delves deeper into the complexity of suicide by examining a spectrum of factors influencing this phenomenon. Neurobiological, psychological, and sociological dimensions will be explored to offer a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the issue. Furthermore, the analysis scrutinizes how communication and culture influence the expression of suicide, examining the potential impact of media narratives on perceptions and behaviours associated with suicide, and how techniques such as storytelling can be harnessed to shape attitudes and promote prevention strategies.

Chapter 3 offers a deeper insight into the reality of suicide in Mexico, exploring its impact through the cultural dimensions proposed by Hofstede. Through a detailed analysis, we will examine how Mexican culture influences this issue and its implications for suicide rates in the country. Additionally, concrete data related to this issue will be examined.

By focusing on the analysis of suicide narratives in Mexican media in this research, the aim is not only to understand the representation of this issue in local media culture but also to provide valuable insights to inform future prevention strategies and the development of guidelines for responsible media coverage. It is hoped that the results of this study will not

only contribute to a better understanding of the phenomenon of suicide in the Mexican context but also inspire a more open and empathetic conversation about this issue, thus reducing stigma and providing greater support to those in need.



## Chapter I

### Storytelling in a Digital Age

Communication, an inherently intricate phenomenon in the human experience, has been a subject of scrutiny across diverse disciplines such as sociology, linguistics, economics, and psychology. These inquiries, driven by the pursuit of a clearer comprehension and the precision to define its meaning, have yielded a substantial body of knowledge. Before delving into the complexities of this phenomenon, it is crucial to acquaint ourselves with pivotal works that have significantly contributed to our understanding of communication.<sup>1</sup>

According to some scholars, such as Friedrich Krotz, “communication is a simultaneous transmission of information and symbolic interaction that is at the same time an inner and an outer process, where humans agree on the definition of situations, where each subject imagines taking the role of the other subject, and where perspectives become entangled with each other” (Fuchs, 2020, p. 69). Additionally, Martínez de Velazco and Nosnik (1988, p. 11) mention that “communication is a process through which one person contacts another through a message and expects the latter to respond, whether it be an opinion, attitude, or behaviour”. James Carey (1989, p. 15) proposes communication as “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed”. Finally, Pasquali (1978, p. 43) describes it as “the human community relationship consisting of the emission-reception of messages between interlocutors in a state of total reciprocity”.

Taking these various definitions into account, we can interpret communication as a process in which information is transmitted through symbols between a sender and receiver, involving the decoding of the message (comprehension), and consequently, feedback.

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<sup>1</sup> On these topics, see McQuail, 2010; Fuchs, 2016; Fuchs, 2020; Honneth, 1999; Fiske, 1982; Aguado, 2004; Watzlawick, Bavelas & Jackson, 1967; Blumer, 1986; Thompson, 1988.

## Communication Studies

In the 20th century, communication sciences emerged as a response to the need to address interdisciplinary areas of study, given the challenge of establishing defined boundaries between different academic fields. These new disciplines originated from the inherent complexity of a multidisciplinary approach and were justified as independent entities within the realm of knowledge (Garza Guzmán, 2014). For instance, in 1987, Berger and Chaffee defined “communication science as that which seeks to understand the production, processing, and effects of systems of symbols and signals through the development of testable theories containing lawful generalizations explaining phenomena associated with production, processing, and effects” (McQuail, 2010, p. 20).

Consequently, studies were primarily divided into two subfields: the study of interpersonal and organizational communication (face-to-face interactions) and the study of mass communication (mass media technologies and institutions) (Lievrouw, 2009). Both have contributed to the analysis of the communication phenomenon by breaking it down into simpler parts, studying its various levels and factors, and examining how it intertwines with relational or institutional structures (Otero, 2019). As a result, communication studies have aided in understanding the fundamental role that communication plays in the interaction between individuals and in the transmission of values, norms, and beliefs for the construction of society. As the social communicator Antonio Pasquali (1978, p. 44) pointed out, “where there is no communication, no social structure can develop”.

In the late twenties, a theory focusing on the social interaction of communication emerged. It was called Symbolic Interactionism, with key figures such as Herbert Blumer, George Herbert Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, and Erving Goffman (García, 2008). This new pragmatic perspective revolutionized psychological studies by shifting the focus to the study of human behaviour from a social standpoint, rather than individually as traditionally done. The theory primarily centres on the concept of “self” in individuals and how our thought structures are formed through interactions with others in society, emphasizing the social influence on the formation of personal identity (Garza Guzmán, 2014).

Symbolic Interactionism is based on the idea that the “self” consists of two aspects: “I” and “me”. The “I” represents the active and immediate part of the human being, the automatic response to stimuli in the surroundings. On the other hand, the “me” is the passive part, where social norms are internalized over time through reflection. These norms or beliefs are acquired through social interactions and impact how the individual behaves, as well as their perception of themselves. In general, the concept of “self”, along with its components, is a social construction necessary for understanding how a human adapts and responds to their environment, creating their own social identity and conception of reality.

The theory also addresses the intricate communication system of human beings, which distinguishes them from animals. Language and gestures are of utmost importance in creating shared symbols with common meanings that enable people to understand and cooperate with each other. This level of communication shapes the social structure and reality, meaning that through individuals’ interactions with the world and the evolution of communication, dynamic processes and structures are created. This facilitates people to negotiate, modify, and manipulate social reality. It is also through this capacity for communication and interaction that actors develop rationality and thought, as these are considered the result of how individuals relate to a group and assume the attitudes of others in a cooperative activity (Mead, 1934; Garza Guzmán, 2014).

According to Mead (1934, p. 225), “it is through social interaction that we learn our ‘place’ in the social world”. He argued that we can come to know ourselves extensively by observing how others react to us because people’s beliefs and opinions are influenced by their social circle. Consequently, individuals gain knowledge and experience by playing the roles that society establishes for its proper functioning (Mead, 1934; Olivera Rivera, 2006).

Subsequently, and in response to the predominant “Transmission Model” by Shannon and Weaver, an approach emerged asserting that social relationships are constructed through interactive communication among participants. This approach was proposed by the Palo Alto School and is also known as the “Orchestral Model of Communication” (García, 2011). The Palo Alto School, also known as the Invisible College, refers to a group of psychiatrists and therapists who collaborated at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California, during

the 1950s and 1960s. Among its prominent figures are Gregory Bateson, Ray Birdwhistell, Don D. Jackson, Albert Schefflen, Stuart Sigman, and Paul Watzlawick (Alsina, 2018).

The Palo Alto School proposed a three-dimensional approach to understanding communication, encompassing syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects. The syntactic focus is on how information is transmitted, exploring communication channels and potential interferences that may hinder message reception. The semantic dimension relates to the interpretation of meanings, i.e., the use of language and shared codes that facilitate communication and mutual understanding. Finally, the pragmatic focus concentrates on the effects of communication on behaviour, recognizing that communication is not unidirectional, as it triggers reactions in behaviour, even when there is no direct verbal response, implying that some form of message is always being conveyed.

Considering that communication is present in every moment of our lives, and we all have social interactions that allow us to learn the social norms present in communication, in 1967, Paul Watzlawick, Janet Beavin Bavelas, and Don D. Jackson put forward their theory of human communication, introducing the so-called “axioms of communication”. These axioms have endured over time as fundamental reference points because, as mentioned earlier, they disrupted the linear model of communication, demonstrating that communication involves a more complex process that must be considered from a systemic perspective based on the concept of exchange (Otero, 2019).

In the theory of human communication (Watzlawick, Bavelas, & Jackson, 1967, pp. 28-39) a series of foundational axioms provides profound insights into the intricacies of interpersonal communication. First and foremost, they assert the impossibility of not communicating. Every action, or even the decision not to respond, invariably conveys a message. For instance, when an individual receives a message but opts for silence, that very silence distinctly communicates disinterest. Moreover, the axiom highlighting the interplay between relationship and content in communication is underscored. Each interaction encapsulates not only the explicit message but also the relational dynamics between participants, thereby shaping the interpretation of the message. Consider, for instance, a teacher reprimanding a student; while the content pertains to the student’s error, the relational context defines how the reprimand is perceived. Another axiom delves into the critical role

of the sequencing of events in the dynamics of interaction. The flow and order of actions and reactions significantly impact the unfolding discourse. For example, if one person expresses a thought and another reacts negatively, the ensuing discussion may be a consequence of the sequence of these actions, with the first person possibly misunderstanding the cause of the negative reaction. Regarding the spectrum of communication, both verbal and non-verbal dimensions are recognized. In a conversation, gestures, facial expressions, and body language wield significance parallel to spoken words. A vivid illustration is when one person speaks, and the other remains silent but communicates discomfort or boredom through visible cues. Lastly, the axioms assert that communication may take on a symmetrical or complementary nature, depending on the equality within the participant relationship. Hierarchy emerges as a pivotal factor; symmetrical communication defines interactions among peers or partners, whereas complementary communication manifests in hierarchical relationships, like those between a leader and a subordinate.

In the realm of communication, it becomes imperative to extend our focus beyond mere linguistic codes and delve into the intricacies of relational dynamics among individuals. This places interaction at the forefront of analysis, surpassing other considerations, and is commonly known as a pragmatic or interactional approach to communication. Its primary contribution lies in asserting that “the concept of communication encompasses all processes through which people exert mutual influence”. Drawing inspiration from Information Theory, Galois Group Theory, and Russell’s Theory of Logical Types, this approach stands out with its contractual emphasis and a perspective focused on the “rules” governing behaviour (Bateson & Ruesch, 1984; Shomaly, 1994; Otero, 2019; García, 2008).

The evolution of studies in communication sciences has been significantly influenced by the advancement of communication technologies and the historical context in which they developed. During the early decades of the 20th century, a significant shift occurred in how people communicated, primarily due to the emergence of mass media such as radio, cinema, and the press. The two World Wars also played a crucial role, with the propaganda effect prompting researchers to question the role of media in society and its impact.

In this context, according to Denis McQuail (2010), three ideas stood out and began to be questioned. The first concerned the power of the new media; the second addressed the

social integration or disintegration it could cause, and the last inquiry focused on public enlightenment, which could be either promoted or diminished.

Similarly, in mass communication, two streams with different approaches emerged: the positivist and the critical. The positivist approach seeks to understand communication from an objective perspective using quantitative methods to study the impact of media on the audience. In other words, it collects observable information on how media influence's public opinion and human behaviour. On the other hand, the critical approach questions power structures and social dynamics of inequality, examining the role of communication in maintaining these systems.

The early research on mass communication is connected to the theories of the “magic bullet” or “hypodermic needle”. This was due to the events of the early 20th century, particularly during wartime, where governments were interested in public opinion and sought to explore techniques of persuasion through political propaganda. It was an era when mass media solidified, technological advancements occurred, and a consumer economy began. In this context, these theories suggested that the audience was a uniform mass. Therefore, when a message is presented appropriately, it can have an immediate and widespread influence on highly vulnerable audiences, leading to changes in the behaviour of recipients. This theory lacked several elements and has been largely discarded, but it served as a starting point for subsequent studies (D’Adamo, Beadoux, & Freidenberg, 2007; Aguado, 2004).

In 1948, Harold Lasswell developed a model specifically focused on mass communication. Essentially, Lasswell had a particular interest in the study of propaganda and its influence in changing opinions, considering it an effective way to gain the support of the masses. Therefore, he posited that, to comprehend communicative processes in mass media, it is essential to address five fundamental questions: “Who is the message sender? What message is being conveyed? What is the purpose behind the communication? Who is the receiving audience? What is the intended impact or effect of the communication? These questions allow for a thorough analysis of each component of the communicative process” (Aguado, 2004, p. 171). Although it is a linear and simplistic model lacking several elements, it has laid the groundwork for understanding mass communication and has served as a reference for numerous studies in the field. Additionally, within his research, Lasswell

established fundamental roles for the media: monitoring the social environment, correlating components of society, and transmitting social legacy (Fiske, 1982).

Later, in the 1950s, sociologist Paul Felix Lazarsfeld developed a more advanced perspective than Lasswell's, considering that mass media also serve an entertainment function. Addressing issues such as social manipulation in his research, Lazarsfeld, in collaboration with Elihu Katz, presented the "two-step flow" theory. They introduced the concept of an "opinion leader" who can be an individual or small groups within society that influence the attitudes and opinions of others. This theory emerged as a response to the previous idea of a direct impact of mass media, proposing a two-stage process where communication first filters through opinion leaders before reaching individuals (Aguado, 2004).

In subsequent years, because of ongoing research, a shift in understanding emerged regarding the nature of the audience and its response to mass media. It became evident that the audience was not a uniform entity, prompting the consideration of additional variables. In 1974, Herbert Kappler proposed the theory of "minimal effects of communication" or "limited effects", challenging the notion of a direct and powerful impact of the media. This theory contends that the influence of mass media on political behaviours and public opinion is constrained, at best offering only temporary reinforcement of individuals' existing political attitudes. The underlying mechanism involves the selectivity of cognitive functions, encompassing aspects such as selective attention, selective perception, memory, and selective action. As a result, cognitive processes tend to be limited and selective, leading individuals to be exposed to opinions akin to their own, ultimately reinforcing pre-existing beliefs and attitudes. This phenomenon is further substantiated by the collective dissonance theory, proposed by Leon Festinger in 1957, which suggests that individuals, when confronted with conflicting information, may reject or reinterpret it to align with their existing beliefs and avoid internal conflict (D'Adamo, Beadoux, & Freidenberg, 2007).

Within this historical context, another theory that surfaced is the uses and gratifications theory, aiming to address questions like these ones: why do people use mass media, and for what purposes? Denis McQuail (2010, p. 353) proposes four assumptions to address these inquiries: Firstly, the selection of content and medium is typically a rational process aligned

with specific goals and satisfactions. Essentially, the audience is proactive, wielding decision-making power, and this behaviour can be logically expounded. Secondly, the audience acknowledges that needs related to media arise within personal and social contexts and can be articulated in terms of motivations. Thirdly, in general, cultural, and aesthetic elements play a minor role in audience attraction compared to the fulfilment of personal and social needs. Lastly, fundamentally, most factors relevant to audience formation can be quantified or measured.

Elihu Katz and Jay G. Blumler underscore the social origin of needs that the media gratifies, laying the foundation for studies in the theory of uses and gratifications. These studies emphasize the active engagement of the audience. Individuals enjoy the freedom to choose both content and medium, allowing the same product to serve various purposes. Media is just one of many resources available for fulfilling needs. People possess awareness shaped by motivations and interests. Deliberate avoidance of judgments is encouraged. When assessing the cultural significance of mass media, subjective evaluations should be sidestepped; what matters most is whether it meets audience needs, with aesthetic appeal holding relatively little importance. (Fiske, 1982, p. 116)

In simpler terms, this theory introduces the notion of an audience actively making decisions in the media landscape, driven by the goal of meeting specific needs. These decisions go beyond content considerations, considering the broader sociocultural context.

Moreover, the Frankfurt School, a group of influential researchers and philosophers including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, and Erich Fromm, pioneered the development of Marxist ideas, giving rise to what has been called the critical theory. This theory critically examines the role of media's productive forces and challenges the cultural industry for its influential impact and societal reproduction. It argues that these dynamics perpetuate power structures, fostering economic inequality, and allowing bourgeois control over the rest of the population. The primary aim of Adorno's critical theory is to unveil how processes of domination operate in modern society and their potential to alienate individuals from their genuine identity and knowledge (Honneth, 1999).

Fundamentally, the Frankfurt school asserts that society places a higher value on efficiency than on genuine art, leading to the emergence of the concept of "pseudo culture".

This term encapsulates all culturally produced items crafted superficially, devoid of artistic or intellectual merit, aligning with the demands and values of the capitalist consumer market. These creations are orchestrated by cultural industries and elites to uphold social conformity, perpetuating an unaltered system that discourages critical or cultural reflection (Aguado, 2004; Fiske, 1982).

In a notion akin to the critical perspective, the Toronto School formulated the medium theory, initially shaped by economist Harold Innis and subsequently influenced by communication theorist Marshall McLuhan. In his seminal work *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, published in 1964, McLuhan introduced the concept that “the medium is the message”. This principle underscores the importance of not only scrutinizing the content of the transmitted message but also evaluating the medium itself. The objective is to fathom how these mediums wield influence over culture and shape interpersonal dynamics.

McLuhan’s theory also delves into the intricate relationship between media and technology. It is imperative to understand how media processes and disseminates messages, and how the audience responds and engages through technology. McLuhan posits that media function as technologies that amplify and intensify cognitive functions. Moreover, he discerns between “hot” and “cool” media. “Cool” media, characterized by low definition, demand heightened involvement from the recipient to grasp the information, exemplified by television. Conversely, “hot” media, boasting high definition, necessitate less participation from the receiver, such as photographs.

McLuhan’s insights persist as pertinent, particularly considering the evolution of new media like the internet and social platforms. His concept of the global village elucidates how media have broadened individuals’ capacity to connect globally, fostering heightened interconnectedness and a more comprehensive global understanding. Nonetheless, they concurrently serve as filters shaping the perception of the world and influencing how people engage with it (FEN, 1969; Aguado, 2004).

## **Culture and Communication**

Building upon the aforementioned, the term “mass communication” encompasses the transmission of messages and the creation of communicative products through various mass media channels, including the press, film, radio, television, and the internet. Its primary objective is to reach broad and diverse audiences, catering to a spectrum of needs, from propagating ideologies to providing entertainment for the populace. Typically, symbolic content or messages are generated in a standardized fashion, emphasizing mass production and recurring identical formulas. This routine practice often results in a diminishing level of creativity due to constant use and overexposure (McQuail, 2010).

The study of mass communication is essential for understanding culture in modern society, as John Thompson (1988, p. 360) pointed out, “mass communication is also seen as a mechanism through which collective beliefs and values are disseminated, serving to sustain existing social relationships”.

Thompson further identifies four characteristics that differentiate mass communication from the process of interpersonal communication: Firstly, despite messages being tailored for the audience, individuals are not physically present during the production or transmission of information. Secondly, the message is conveyed through a technological medium, influencing the encoding and interpretation of the information. Thirdly, the information and content produced and transmitted serve a commercial purpose, created with the aim of generating economic value. Finally, the dissemination of messages is accessible to a broader audience, and the medium allows them to endure over time and space (Thompson, 1988, pp. 364-366).

In modern societies, cultural forms proliferate through the mechanisms and institutions of mass communication. Owners of mass media and powerful institutions play a crucial role in creating media products that selectively and creatively incorporate and reproduce cultural forms of everyday life. These contents are often designed to respond to market demands and may not always prioritize artistic quality, but they are endorsed by elites seeking to maintain their influence (Thompson, 1988).

This phenomenon is commonly referred to as the “cultural industry”. It revolves around the production and commercial distribution of cultural products, including music, films, books, and more. These activities contribute significantly to the formation of a culture characterized by mass consumption (Gunster, 2000).

However, to gain a clearer understanding of these concepts and their role in shaping “culture”, it is essential to comprehend what we mean by the term itself. Similar to the concept of communication, culture has been studied by various disciplines, and different authors provide distinct definitions. According to the dictionaries, culture can be defined as the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits characteristic of a racial, religious, or social group. Additionally, it encompasses the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior, which relies on the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023; Williams., 1958)

In the realm of anthropology, culture is perceived as encompassing all aspects of daily life, ranging from mundane activities such as taking a shower to engaging in social events like watching a soccer match with friends (Downing & O'Connor, 1995, p. 3). On the flip side, anthropologist Johann Herder emphasizes a pluralistic view of cultures, suggesting the existence of multiple cultures rather than a singular entity. He conceives culture as various forms of thought that are shared among people and serve as expressions of national identity (Denby, 2005, pp. 62-63). Raymond Williams (1958, p. 91) defines it as a “complete way of life” encompassing daily, documented, and traditional culture.

Defining “culture” is a nuanced undertaking, but McQuail (2010, p. 98) emphasizes key characteristics that should persist regardless of the various perspectives. Culture, according to McQuail, is inherently a collective and shared phenomenon, devoid of a purely individual manifestation. It involves symbolic communication, whether intentional or not, and is characterized by norms and an organized structure. Furthermore, culture is dynamic, undergoing transformation and evolution over time. Crucially, communication plays a fundamental role in both the creation and sustenance of culture, signifying that culture and communication are interconnected and mutually dependent. In essence, culture cannot exist in isolation from the communicative processes that shape and define it. Finally, to study culture comprehensively, we must be able to recognize and position it. Essentially, there are

three areas to explore: within individuals, within objects (texts, artifacts), and within human behaviors (socially). Elaborating on the points mentioned earlier, we can characterize “culture” as a collective system wherein shared meanings are reinforced through social interactions. It encompasses an organized structure with norms guiding societal behavior, impacting everyday practices, traditions, and artistic expressions. As a dynamic system, it evolves over time to meet the shifting needs of society, representing an active and continuous process of communication and understanding.

Furthermore, culture and communication are intricately linked, as culture is not only created but also transmitted through social interactions, inherently involving communication. Simultaneously, each instance of communication contributes to the ongoing production of culture. Consequently, culture plays a shaping, conditioning, facilitating, or constraining role in daily communication, while communication serves as a reflection of culture and its systemic structure (Fuchs, 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to understand how the concepts of “communication”, “culture”, and “media” are interconnected and play a key role in the imposition and transmission of a set of beliefs known as “ideology”.

Communication, especially through diverse mass media channels, serves as a primary mechanism for spreading ideological concepts. Culture, in turn, provides the framework and context for these ideas within society. The media, in their influential role, have the power to mold and condition public perception of ideology. These components are essential in the construction of reality and the formation of personal identity.

Noting the importance of viewing culture inclusively, individuals naturally align themselves with a group or authority figure to forge a sense of integral belonging within society. This phenomenon becomes apparent through the powerful influence of popular culture. Shared through various media such as art, music, film, books, and more, stories, narratives, and symbols play a substantial role in shaping individual identity and fostering a connection with prevailing cultural norms (Gripsrud, 2017).

Culture is not uniform but varies notably among diverse societies and groups within them. Human identity isn't a static, universal entity; rather, it is shaped through distinct culture (Geertz, 1973).

## **The Narrative Turn**

Personal identity emerges through ongoing communication and interactions with others (Mead, 1934). Each person perceives their identity as a collective outcome, shaped in a specific social and historical context. These joint actions contribute to defining the individual's role in a specific social system. Therefore, identity involves a logical reflexivity, allowing individuals to self-observe (either individually or socially/collectively) over time to comprehend their behavior within society.

Aligning with Timothy Crusius's perspective, a communication theorist who conceptualizes identification processes as a "logic of terminologies", wherein symbols and meanings intertwine beyond rationality, popular culture serves as a facilitating medium for identification through products and narratives that resonate with our experiences and values (McClure, 2009).

This connection between identity and visual culture highlights the relevance of the topic. Films, music, books, video games, and social media become channels that communicate shared values and norms, creating common ground where individuals can explore and negotiate their identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

Visual culture, with its inclusive and exclusive qualities, enables the identification of individuals with groups and differentiation, especially among adolescents, who, through these interactions, gain knowledge about interpersonal connections, form communities, and engage with their peers. Essentially, visual culture plays a fundamental role in shaping social identity by supporting the formation of categories of attitudes and beliefs. Beyond serving as mere external expression, visual culture serves as a dynamic communication channel between artists and the audience through shared experiences (Freedman, 2006).

Although shared symbols, such as memes, are generated through images and objects, it is essential to have narrative elements that contribute a story to establish a meaningful connection and foster a sense of belonging. It is due to this necessity that culture is intrinsically linked to language, as the narrative perspective suggests. Through language, we not only interpret and express our stories but also shape our thinking, influencing our emotions and actions (Iñiguez, 2001). According to Walter Fisher's paradigmatic narrative

theory, stories are not just narratives; they embody shared emotional experiences that deeply influence how we perceive and project ourselves in society. Exposure to diverse narratives not only enhances the emotional connection with our own stories but also expands our emotional spectrum, allowing us to explore various perspectives in the dynamic construction of identity (McClure, 2009).

Having a coherent narrative about ourselves and the world around us allows us to be part of groups with which we identify. This capacity for identification provides us with social categories that delineate the expectations and the way in which we relate to and behave in society, as highlighted by Michael A. Hogg and Scott A. Reid in their article *Social Identity, Self-Categorization* (2006, p. 14):

For example, stories embedded in narrative and discourse manage bonds among group members, construct representations of social categories, and such representations of group (and situational) norms influence what people actually talk about. People also tend to use more abstract language to describe behaviours that are consistent with normative expectations and more concrete language to describe behaviours that are inconsistent with normative expectations.

This narrative not only allows us to create our own reality but, through the experiences and emotions it evokes, it connects us with stories crafted in a social and historical context different from ours, as mentioned by Peter Brooks (1992, p. 3) in his book *Reading for the Plot*:

We live immersed in narrative, recounting and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, anticipating the outcome of our future projects, situating ourselves at the intersection of several stories not yet completed. Narrative may be a special ability or competence that we learn, a certain subset of the general language code which, when mastered, allows us to summarize and retransmit narratives in other words and languages, to transfer them into other media, while remaining recognizably faithful to the original narrative structure and message.

## Storytelling and Emotions

A powerful strategy to establish an emotional connection and persuade the audience is storytelling, which goes beyond mere information transmission. Various scholars have explained this phenomenon, as exemplified in the article *Storytelling in Media Communication: Media and Art Models* (2020):

For example, Oleg Samartsev, a professor at Ulyanov State University, defines storytelling as a unique genre or ‘style’ of writing, termed ‘features writing’ by Western researchers. He asserts that storytelling involves the disclosure of dramatic events of public life crafted as stories. In essence, storytelling transforms into a distinct form of artistic reality within the genre’s methodology. According to Nicolay Ponomarev, storytelling is a peculiar narrative that exposes, in a certain sequence, real or fictitious stories with the participation of intelligent, sensitive subjects, whose involvement in this narrative scenario is paramount. This type of storytelling appeals to sensational, cultural, and memory elements in general because it organizes information in such a way that the human consciousness perceives not each event individually but as part of a chain of narratives. Therefore, storytelling with a local character inevitably draws from folklore or cultural-historical memory to interpret eternal values with a modern twist. Nevertheless, universal human feelings and values, such as kindness, mercy, humanity, and tolerance, are not foreign to storytelling. (Amangeldiyeva, Toktagazin, Omarov, Tapanova, & Nurtazina, 2020, pp. 3164-3165)

This thoughtful and intriguing approach not only captures attention but also triggers deep cognitive processes in both the narrator and the receiver<sup>2</sup>. At the core of storytelling lies metacognition, the ability to reflect on one’s own thoughts. The narrator, aware of the narrative resources used, efficiently guides the story, while the listener interprets and relates the events to their own experiences. This process generates deep immersion and a more

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<sup>2</sup> For a comprehensive exploration of storytelling, consider the following references: Toinaven, Nelimarkka, & Valaskivi, 2022; Wilson, 2014; Brooks, 2022; Simmons, 2019; Salmon, 2010; Ryan, 2004; Booker, 2004.

meaningful connection between the interpretation of the story and the subjective experience of the receiver.

Cognitive connection intensifies in a “liminal” state, a transitional state that alters perception, known as narrative experience and flow. In this state, imagination and the mind take on a more significant presence than physical reality, allowing for a deeper absorption of the narrative. Mental structures, such as “scripts” and the “plot”, contribute to building narrative cognition. “Scripts” are based on stored knowledge and experiences, anticipating development and making sense of the plot. The “plot”, the logic and dynamics of the narrative, becomes a form of understanding and explanation (Ryan P. , 2008; Brooks, 1992).

Christopher Booker, in his book *The Seven Basic Plots* (2004, pp. 215-228), suggests that stories frequently draw upon seven fundamental plots. These plots stem from archetypes<sup>3</sup>, representing foundational images and situations deeply embedded within the human psyche. It is argued that these structures are so deeply ingrained in our psyche that when creating stories in our imagination, we inevitably resort to them. Consequently, from a young age, children develop an intuitive grasp of narratives, owing to the symbolic language through which stories are constructed. This exposure awakens within them an innate pattern of preprogrammed responses residing in their unconscious.

Universal to all narratives, regardless of their complexity, there is always a universal problem known as the “dark power”. This problem can manifest in various forms—whether through characters, objects, events, or even the protagonist. From this, the seven basic plots are identified. The first is “overcoming the monster”, which involves the protagonist confronting an evil force and overcoming it after all obstacles. The second, “rags to riches”, describes the transformation of the main character from poverty to wealth or to a successful position. Exploring the weaknesses and mistakes of the central figure or figures, the third plot, “the quest”, delves into obstacles that may impede their journey towards their goal. The fourth, “voyage and return”, examines the process of maturation through a change in the hero’s psychological centre. In “comedy” the fifth plot, selfishness impacts characters, casting them into their shadow and obstructing the flow of life. However, upon resolution,

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<sup>3</sup> Archetype: the original pattern or model of which all things of the same type are representations or copies (Merriam Webster Dictionary, 2024).

characters undergo liberation. The sixth, “tragedy”, like the previous one, exposes the consequences of being possessed by the ruthless part of the hero’s personality, but without being able to undergo the necessary internal transformation to free oneself. Reaching a point where the darkness can only be eliminated by their own death. And finally, in “rebirth”, the dark power is presented as something external to the central figure, for example, it could be personified in a mysterious figure with magical powers. It’s important to acknowledge that narratives have the potential to intertwine multiple plotlines simultaneously or, in certain instances, may diverge entirely from conventional structures. In her narrative theory, Marie-Laure Ryan (2004) emphasizes the importance of “story logic”:

Story logic refers to both the logic that stories have and the logic they are. Stories have a logic that consists of strategies for coding circumstances, participants, states, actions, and events in the “storyworlds”, that is, the global mental representations that interpreters are prompted to create when they read or listen to a narrative. Besides, narrative also constitutes a logic in its own right, providing human beings with one of their primary resources for comprehending experience and organizing interaction. The first kind of logic pertains chiefly to narrative as a product, the second kind of logic to narrative as a process. In particular, the logic that stories are encompasses processes of narrative communication; at issue are the ways in which people tell and make sense of stories in specific communicative contexts, that is, the methods by which narratives are deployed as contextually situated practices (2004, p. 50).

Stories transcend linear narration, embracing diverse structures that incorporate essential components: a compelling beginning, conflict, climax, and resolution. These elements are fundamental to persuasive communication. By introducing central protagonists and well-defined settings, narratives invite audiences to immerse themselves, fostering empathy and a profound connection with the underlying messages:

“That is, storytelling is not only the style of telling, but also the active process of storytelling: Storytelling is engaging the reader in empathy for the heroes, bringing the reader and actors closer together, setting problems of the work in such a way that it

becomes close, understandable, appeals not only to the mind, but also to the emotions”  
(Amangeldiyeva, Toktagazin, Omarov, Tapanova, & Nurtazina, 2020, p. 3166).

Whether delivered orally, visually, or through the written word, performance adds a crucial layer to persuasion. How a story unfolds significantly contributes to its emotional impact. Adapting narratives to specific contexts enhances their relevance and personal resonance. Moreover, the presentation of stories within a persuasive framework greatly influences their perception and reception. Furthermore, leveraging iconicity to symbolize complex concepts enhances persuasion, tapping into visual imagination and memory. Through these techniques, storytelling becomes a powerful tool for effective communication.

Together, these components emphasize the deep importance of storytelling as a persuasive tool, exerting control over emotions and behaviours. Through nurturing emotional bonds, skilfully adjusting to various contexts, and delivering narratives with powerful resonance, stories become a formidable influence capable of melding perceptions, altering attitudes, and ultimately propelling the actions one seeks (Leslie, 2015). In other words, storytelling is more than just conveying information; it’s also about establishing an emotional bond with the audience and conveying a deeper significance that enables people to identify with the story, regardless of its context.

A compelling illustration of the power of storytelling to persuade and induce behavioral changes is found in the technique of mutual storytelling. This approach is employed in therapeutic contexts, especially with children aged 9 to 14, to facilitate communication and emotional understanding. The key premise lies in engaging the child in the creation of stories as a means to access their thoughts, emotions, and experiences indirectly and non-threateningly.

In this strategy, the therapist invites the child to tell a story, paying attention to metaphors and the child’s emotional reactions. Subsequently, the therapist uses that story as a foundation to tell another story, addressing the same themes but providing a different and healthier resolution. This process aims to influence the child’s behavioral change by offering a deeper understanding and presenting positive alternatives through shared narrative. By utilizing the same context and characters, the therapist effectively communicates in the

child's "language", facilitating connection and comprehension (Schaefer & Cangelosi, 2002; Stiles & Kottman, 1990).

Demonstrating its effectiveness, this method has proven beneficial for children dealing with crises and suicidal thoughts, as illustrated in a paper by Kathy Stiles and Terry Koen titled *Mutual Storytelling: An Intervention for Depressed and Suicidal Children* (1990). The case of Nathan, presented as an exemplar, reflects his challenges at school arising from feelings of inadequacy and the trauma associated with the tragic death of his older sister during a shared playtime accident.

The mutual storytelling technique allowed the therapist to establish a meaningful connection with Nathan by having him identify with the shared story. Through this process, Nathan underwent a gradual transformation in his behavior, overcoming the crisis he was facing. The shared narrative provided him with a safe avenue to explore and express his thoughts and emotions, contributing to his emotional well-being and overcoming the challenges he was encountering at that critical moment (Stiles & Kottman, 1990, pp. 339-341). Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize, as observed, that storytelling also exerts a notable influence in mass media, largely owing to technological advancements and the way we now interact, especially through the Internet and social media.

## **Storytelling and the Digital Society**

The transformation, driven by technological advances, has permeated every aspect of our daily lives, including the way we tell stories. As mentioned earlier, the key element for the success of storytelling, as emphasized by Dick Leith in his book *Storytellers' Keywords*, is connection:

The practice of storytelling in general seems to me to be about connection: between storyteller and audience, storyteller, and a story's source (often living people), actions and events within stories, and among stories themselves. I have found that in telling stories I have felt part of some endless, three-dimensional web of connectedness. (Leith, 2002, p. 13).

This idea becomes particularly relevant when we observe how “traditional storytelling” has continually adapted to emerging media, propelled by the ongoing development of new technologies. Consequently, a contemporary form called digital storytelling has emerged. This approach harnesses the potential of digital platforms to deliver even more immersive and participatory narrative experiences, signalling a new chapter in how we share and consume stories. By redefining the narrative landscape, digital storytelling ushers in an era where engagement and immersion seamlessly blend with the capabilities offered by digital platforms.

This reinvention of storytelling has always existed, but in this new “digital revolution”, it becomes a broader and more dynamic possibility. Michael Wilson, in his article *Another Fine Mess: The Condition of Storytelling in the Digital Age (2014)*, describes this nature as ‘messy’ referring to:

a multiplicity of forms, of media, of perspectives, of truths, of meanings, of texts, of relationships; and, storytelling’s temporary nature, whereby stories resist definition and documentation. Stories live in the moment. One might even say that they perform the moment and then are gone, only to reconstruct themselves and reappear for the new moment, the new context (Wilson, 2014, p. 126).

The advent of the Internet has ushered in a new era of platforms that not only grant individuals increased access to stories crafted by corporations and influential entities (via advertising) but also empower everyone to step into the role of a storyteller, fostering a novel form of co-production. This transformative phenomenon blurs the traditional demarcation between narrator and listener, presenting an unprecedented opportunity for individuals to create and share personal narratives free from constraints such as financial barriers, geographical limitations, or specific professional backgrounds, such as those typically associated with communicators or journalists.

This process evolves into a democratic and inclusive act, making storytelling accessible to all, fostering connections with like-minded groups or individuals, and surmounting obstacles related to geographical boundaries and social strata. Furthermore, this democratization of storytelling not only amplifies visibility but also enhances the diversity

of narratives, thereby enriching and potentially reshaping our cultural landscape (Wilson, 2014).

As noted earlier, extensive research has been conducted over the years on the impact of mass media on public opinion and societal construction through culture. Consequently, the concept of mediation takes on paramount importance, transcending the mere transmission of information. Mediation involves the interpretation, adaptation, and active participation of the audience in relation to messages. While the term “media” focuses on the channels or platforms used to disseminate content and messages, mediation encompasses how recipients perceive, consume, and interact with these media messages. In this regard, mediation acknowledges the active involvement and interaction of individuals with the media, underscoring how this engagement plays a pivotal role in meaning creation and the formation of experience, both at an individual and collective level.

Interactivity entails a dynamic connection between users and the system, fostering affiliation and mutual feedback. In new media, mediation surpasses temporal and spatial limitations, enhancing the user experience by personalizing preferences and providing the opportunity to generate one’s own content, bringing new perspectives without relying on a media company (Lievrouw, 2011).

In the digital era, media systems possess the characteristic of not only being standalone products but also of promoting and reinforcing consumerist practices. Another key concept is that of remediation, which involves the reuse and reinterpretation of existing media material. In other words, it is the process by which media build upon the existing content of other media. Remediation can take various forms, such as reshaping narratives, media criticism, and using media as a source to support original media production. A clear example is when a video is used as a reference on social media to express an opinion, thus generating new content from a different perspective.

Fundamentally, remediation recognizes that new media doesn’t operate in isolation; instead, it exists in an interconnected web, each component building upon the work of others. It can be viewed as a dynamic dialogue between different media forms, where content is taken, transformed, and presented in innovative ways. For instance, consider the adaptation

of a book into a television series or film—an identical story reimaged for a distinct medium, narrated in diverse forms (Toivanen, Nelimarkka, & Valaskivi, 2022).

Now, with technological advancement, new possibilities for multimedia storytelling have opened. Multimedia resources such as video, images, and music can be integrated into the same medium to tell a richer and more immersive story. According to Marie-Laure Ryan, narratives across various media platforms leverage a shared framework of narrative design principles, yet they tailor them uniquely to suit each medium. In essence, each medium possesses distinctive characteristics that shape the structure and presentation of the narrative.

Further, since both narratives and non-narratives can be expressed in one and the same medium, neither the form nor the substance of the expression side is definitive of story. What defines narrative, rather, is the form of its content side, that is, the way a sequence of (medium-specific) cues must be structured for it to encode a narratively organized (but non-medium-specific) sequence of participants-in-events (Ryan, 2004, p.52).

This approach to narrative, according to Ryan, is more based on the organization of content than on its mode of expression. As previously mentioned, the importance of storytelling lies in its structure.

These practices not only influence how stories are presented but also shape our interactions with emerging media in contemporary society. In her article *New Media, New Audiences?* (1999) Sonia Livingstone illuminates pivotal changes in the landscape of new media and audience dynamics.

Livingstone's first insight revolves around the "multiplication of personally owned media", underscoring a departure from shared family devices to a scenario where every member of a modern household possesses their individual electronic device for personal use. This marks a significant departure from the past when a single television was shared within the family. Presently, individuals curate and consume content at their preferred times and locations, effectively blurring the traditional demarcation between private and public spheres.

A subsequent facet identified by Livingstone is the "diversifying in forms and contents" (1999, p. 62) The relentless acquisition of new devices with advanced technology fuels a continuous generation of diverse content. This perpetual influx not only encourages

constant consumption but also shapes individuals' self-perception based on evolving concepts of "lifestyle". Socially, these practices contribute to a discernible trend towards individualism, particularly observed in Western societies. Yet another significant observation pertains to "convergent forms of information services", where virtually all our devices and information are intricately interconnected. This phenomenon mirrors the pervasive integration of technology into our daily routines, resulting in an incessant generation of information that companies deftly leverage for their marketing strategies.

Livingstone concludes her insights by highlighting the growing importance of interactivity, empowering individuals to actively participate in the creation of media content. This underscores a paradigm shift from passive consumption to active engagement, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between consumers and media (Livingstone, 1999, pp. 61-62). As we discern these enduring concepts, it becomes apparent that their manifestation evolves over time, shaped by individuals' adaptive usage and evolving relationships. This dynamic interplay underscores the intricate and ever-changing interaction between emerging media and societal practices.



## Chapter II

### Suicide and the Social Imagination

Suicide, perceived as an intricate and multifactorial phenomenon, will be subjected to a detailed analysis in this chapter. The growing global concern over rising suicide rates has sparked a deeper exploration of this act, going beyond its characterization as a mere “tragic end”. Within this context, we will delve into the perspectives of experts such as Émile Durkheim<sup>4</sup>, the World Health Organization<sup>5</sup>, and the National Institute of Mental Health<sup>6</sup> to lay a robust conceptual foundation.

This chapter will break down the various facets of suicide, addressing not only the completed act but also suicide attempts and ideation. To do so, we will immerse ourselves in the intricate network of social, psychological, cognitive, and neurobiological factors that interact in the genesis of this behaviour. Progressing further, we will explore in detail the impact that narrative has on the perception and response to suicide. From the historical “Werther effect”<sup>7</sup> to contemporary cases, we will examine how artistic and media representations can trigger emotional responses and influence imitative behaviours. The emotional connection and identification generated by a compelling narrative emerge as crucial factors in the process of social contagion. To initiate our understanding of this subject, let’s establish a clear definition.

Durkheim, in his work *Suicide* (1928, p. 3) defines this action as “any death resulting, either immediately or mediately, from a positive or negative act accomplished by the victim”.

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<sup>4</sup> Émile Durkheim (1858-1917), an influential French sociologist and pioneer of sociology, published “Suicide: A Sociological Study” in 1897.

<sup>5</sup> The World Health Organization (WHO) is a United Nations agency founded in 1948. Its mission is to promote global health, prevent diseases, and improve health conditions worldwide.

<sup>6</sup> The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) is a biomedical research agency in the United States, specializing in studies related to mental health.

<sup>7</sup> The “Werther effect” describes the observed increase in suicides following media coverage or publicized suicides, named after Goethe's character Werther. It suggests that exposure to suicide, particularly if portrayed romantically, can influence similar behaviours in others.

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) characterizes it as “the act of deliberately ending one’s own life”, while the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2023) in the United States describes it as a “death caused by self-injurious behaviour directed with the intention of dying as a result”.

Within this context, it is decisive to dissect concepts, understanding that suicide encompasses not only the completed act but also suicide attempts and ideation. The latter are included in the term “parasuicide”, describing behaviours that mimic a suicide attempt but do not result in death. The NIMH defines an attempt as non-fatal self-injurious behaviour directed towards oneself with the intention of dying as a result, even if it does not necessarily cause injuries. Conversely, suicidal ideation involves thinking, contemplating, or planning suicide ( National Institute of Mental Health , 2023; Muñoz, 2018).

As mentioned earlier, the occurrence of suicide or attempted suicide involves a complex interaction of various factors, including social, psychological, neurobiological, and other elements. While each case is unique, it is possible to identify variables that frequently manifest in individuals with suicidal behaviour. In this chapter, we will meticulously break down each of these factors and explore their implications, aiming to gain a deeper understanding. Recognizing its complexities is essential for identifying key determinants that will guide the development of more effective prevention strategies and contribute to the eradication of the stigma associated with this behaviour. Therefore, let’s engage in a comprehensive and empathetic discussion about suicide.

## **Cultural Background**

The phenomenon of suicide has persisted throughout history, and what has evolved over time is the perception and interpretation of this act in the context of social norms. When examining the socio-historical backdrop and acknowledging the inherent uncertainties in historical evidence, we gain insight into how the paradigm and its connection with death reflect the attitudes and social biases intrinsic to each era.

In Ancient Greece, suicide was deemed a crime against the state, viewed as a “self-murder”, a disrespectful act challenging the will of the gods. Those who took their own lives were often laid to rest outside the city, with their hands amputated in a secluded location. Plato, aligned with the teachings of his mentor Socrates, asserted that human life holds a meaningful purpose in the pursuit of knowledge and the growth of the soul. From this standpoint, suicide would be seen as contradictory to the essential purpose of existence. Conversely, Aristotle regarded suicide as a social irresponsibility, a direct affront against the society to which one belongs. It was perceived as an impediment to the full development of an individual’s capabilities, classified as an act of cowardice that brought dishonour. Influenced by Plato’s ideals, Stoic philosophy, founded by Zeno of Citium, argued that living in harmony with nature, essentially virtue, entailed a rejection of suicide. Although there is mention of Zeno’s death by this cause in his old age and while enduring pain, it is not definitively confirmed, and his philosophy spoke against such an act. It is important to highlight that, in Ancient Greece, suicide could be considered legitimate if sufficient arguments were presented before the Senate to support it. Authorities always listened to these arguments, underscoring Greek society’s importance to rationality and noble motives. In essence, the Greeks paved the way for a more reasoned and emotionally restrained approach to suicide.

In the Roman Empire, under the influence of stoicism, suicide began to be viewed as an expression of freedom, provided it was supported by justified reasons such as illness, philosophical beliefs, love, honour, or condemnation. The Roman society placed significant importance on the method and circumstances surrounding death. For individuals under the dominion of the State, like slaves or soldiers, the act of suicide was explicitly forbidden. However, everyone was recognized the right to end their own life in situations of unbearable suffering. Essentially, Roman law condemned suicide only when it had economic repercussions for the State or the upper class.

Conversely, certain cultures held suicide in high regard. In India, the practice of “Sati” involved the voluntary self-immolation of widows, symbolizing love and loyalty. In Japan, the code of honour prompted samurai warriors to engage in “seppuku” or “hara-kiri”, to uphold dignity and atone for dishonourable acts. Even in the absence of wrongdoing, it was

encouraged upon the death of their lord to avoid being a warrior without a master. Among the Visigoths, leaping from the Rock of Ancestors symbolized courage when entering paradise. For the Vikings, gaining entry into “Valhalla” required a violent death, with the highest honour reserved for those who died in battle, and the second being suicide.

During the Middle Ages, the prohibition of suicide emerged with the spread of Christianity, rooted in the explicit commandment, “Thou shalt not kill”. This prohibition extended even to the individual, categorizing suicide as a mortal sin. Consequently, those who opted for suicide were branded as criminals, denied burial rights, and often subjected to humiliation. These practices persisted until the Renaissance, introducing the confiscation of belongings for those who took their own lives, funnelling these assets into the crown. Nobles who chose suicide faced the loss of titles, casting dishonour upon their families, to the point where family heraldic symbols, known as ‘escutcheons’, were obliterated. Post-Revolution France witnessed a significant shift in these perspectives, decriminalizing suicide and positioning it as a manifestation of individual freedom, challenging prejudices in favour of reason. However, these views did not uniformly evolve in other parts of the world. Nonetheless, diverse studies from medical and sociological disciplines were initiated to provide a more scientific explanation (Alvarez, 1972; Moron, 1994; Cohen Agrest, 2007).

While remnants of religious beliefs persist, upholding suicide as a taboo practice, contemporary society is making continuous efforts for its identification, diagnosis, and treatment. Although not prohibited in various parts of the world, it is also not legally recognized as a right, as Durkheim suggests:

It not only affects morality, but the sacrifice of one’s life surpasses the lawful activity of the individual. Because the right to life, due to its high quality, is protected by ethical norms as well as legal prescriptions. Life is both the object and subject of law. In this legal relationship, the subject and object are inseparable. Therefore, the right to life loses its alienability (Ruiz-Funes, 1928, p. 5).

In this context, the notion that everyone owns their own life and has the right to exercise it according to their desires is confronted by the contradiction that claiming this right to end it automatically implies its revocation. This intricate perspective persists across societies,

presenting a dichotomy in approaching the topic. On one side, there's acknowledgment of individual rights; on the other, the decision to end one's life grapples with ethical and legal barriers. The societal weight attached to suicide further muddles the situation. Distinguishing between suicide and accidental deaths is challenging due to limited information or deliberate concealment of certain facts. This lack of clarity not only distorts suicide rate statistics but also hampers our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

It's vital to consider known factors contributing to the risk of suicidal behaviour. Merely focusing on the result of death can lead to errors, mislabelling events. Human behaviour is always shaped by its context, making it imperative to understand it deeply when addressing this sensitive issue.

### **Neurobiological Factors**

Delving into the neuroscientific dimensions of this phenomenon is not just crucial for pinpointing causes more accurately but also for steering towards a more comprehensive and compassionate approach in the realm of mental health. When we navigate the intricacies of the brain in individuals grappling with suicidal behaviour or ideation, we confront an initial challenge, neuropsychological tests, by definition, are only feasible in the living. This means that those who carry out suicidal acts may harbour differences in their mental processes that elude direct examination. However, despite this limitation, the journey of neuroscience research continues to progress (Lengvenyte, Conejero, Courtet, & Olié, 2021).

Given these conditions, it's worth noting that while most studies focus on individuals who have experienced suicide attempts, a handful have been conducted postmortem. This approach aims to deepen our understanding of how biological conditions, coupled with psychosocial factors, not only influence emotions but also shape the central nervous system. Additionally, there's a quest to uncover the potential neurobiological diathesis, an innate predisposition in the nervous system that might heighten susceptibility to suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

In the intricate landscape of suicidal behaviour, the brain emerges as a fundamental terrain to explore its foundations. Specifically, certain brain regions and neurochemical systems stand out as key players. When undergoing significant alterations, these components establish connections with suicidal behaviour. These modifications not only originate from internal factors but are also closely linked to chronic pain, persistent stress, and adversities in early life stages.

In the vast expanse of the brain, numerous regions command attention, each playing a distinct role in the complex choreography of suicidal behaviour. The Prefrontal Cortex, delineated into ventromedial and dorsolateral divisions, assumes a pivotal role in orchestrating executive functions, ranging from planning to decision-making. Alterations in this domain weave intricately with changes in executive functions, exerting a profound influence on the delicate equilibrium of suicidal tendencies. The Orbitofrontal Cortex, a partner in the prefrontal realm, becomes entwined with compromised decision-making, laying the groundwork for impulsive and suicidal inclinations. The Locus Coeruleus, a nucleus nestled in the brainstem producing norepinephrine, showcases variances in neuron density among those who've grappled with suicide, especially within the realm of depression. This nucleus, orchestrating behaviour mediation, can sway the ebb and flow of brain activity, especially in the face of stress.

The Amygdala, the maestro of emotions and olfactory perceptions, introduces an emotional chord into the symphony of pain. Studies hint at the amygdala's heightened activity in individuals with major depressive disorder (MDD), particularly during stress-laden moments, potentially becoming a catalyst for chronic pain. A bloated amygdala volume emerges in those who've ventured into suicide attempts, hinting at a possible entanglement with impulsivity and decision-making.

The Hippocampus, a revered "memory control centre", undergoes shrinkage in the realm of depression, casting ripples across information processing and decision-making capabilities. Beyond its memory function, the hippocampus also responds to pain. Yet, a malfunctioning hippocampus can result in peculiar responses to pain, underscoring its importance in diverse cognitive and emotional aspects.

The Thalamus, entrusted with ferrying sensory information from body to cortex, dwindles in those grappling with depression, moulding the emotional contours of pain processing. The Insular Cortex, a linchpin in information processing and pain contextualization, assumes a pivotal role in our mental theatre. While decoding painful scenarios and infusing them with emotional hues, this region acts as an “alert centre”, flagging signals of danger or pain. Shifts in the Insular Cortex come to light among individuals wrestling with suicidal inclinations, particularly in the embrace of depression. Beyond its role in processing emotional pain, this cerebral quarter plays a vital role in navigating situations that stoke feelings of exclusion. The Cingulate Cortex, a conductor orchestrating cognitive decisions and emotional responses, steps into the spotlight in the narrative of vulnerability to suicide. The Basal Ganglia, notably the Striatum, a realm linked with motivation and reward, wields influence over the evaluation of rewards and decision-making, pivotal elements in the quest to forestall suicidal tendencies. Collectively, these cerebral landscapes and chemical orchestrations weave a rich tapestry underpinning the intricate dynamics of suicidal behaviour (Lengvenyte, Conejero, Courtet, & Olié, 2021; Jr, et al., 2018; Torres, 2012).

The limbic system plays a pivotal role in emotion regulation and is closely associated with individuals exhibiting suicidal behaviour.

To comprehend the intricate interplay of these actions, one must recognize that the brain, serving as the central regulator of our mood and behaviour, relies on chemicals known as neurotransmitters<sup>8</sup>. These compounds serve various mental functions, and disruptions in their balance have been linked to the susceptibility of suicide.

Serotonin, for instance, plays a vital role in various aspects of behaviour, movement, pain, sexual activity, appetite, heart functions, and the sleep-wake cycle. Derived from tryptophan, it is involved in different bodily functions. Notably, dysfunction in the serotonergic system in the frontal cortex has been linked to a higher risk of developing “trait-dependent” tendencies, substance dependence, and disturbances in the regulation of anxious, impulsive, and aggressive behaviours. Serotonin is considered crucial for inhibiting

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<sup>8</sup> Neurotransmitter: A chemical that is made by nerve cells and used to communicate with other cells, including other nerve cells and muscle cells (National Cancer Institute, 2023).

impulsivity and modulating various behavioural processes. Similarly, norepinephrine, which is linked to stress and aggression, may contribute to depressive disorders, and increase the propensity for aggressive behaviours. It plays a crucial role in attention, reward systems, and stress activation, with an increased concentration associated with a higher frequency of suicide attempts. Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid (GABA), acting primarily as an inhibitory neurotransmitter in the central nervous system (CNS), serves to reduce neuronal activity and signal transmission between nerve cells. GABA has two types of projections, short and long-range, affecting different brain structures. From a biological perspective, the relationship between neurochemical changes in suicidal individuals and the abnormal distribution of GABA, the activity of the frontopolar cortex in decision-making, and epigenetic factors such as DNA methylation<sup>9</sup> is highlighted. It is noted that the inhibitory function of GABA can be activated due to the consumption of central nervous system depressants, such as marijuana and alcohol, increasing vulnerability to suicide attempts (Cuesta & Salazar, 2015).

Moreover, the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) Axis communicates with various organs through hormonal cascades, playing a pivotal role in regulating the immune system, metabolism, and other physiological functions. Under normal circumstances, this axis regulates cortisol release in response to stress. However, disruptions in its functionality can heighten the risk of suicidal behaviour. Influencing this relationship are factors such as age, family history, and early traumatic experiences (Turecki, et al., 2019, p. 8).

In connection with this intricate relationship between the brain and the risk of suicide, various studies have explored the Stressor-Diathesis model. This model suggests that suicide is not merely an extreme reaction to difficult situations but the result of the interaction between external stressors and a person's genetic predisposition or vulnerability. Life events like financial struggles or emotional losses act as triggers, while diathesis<sup>10</sup>, encompassing genetic predisposition, is linked to traits such as pessimism, hopelessness, and aggression.

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<sup>9</sup> Methylation: A chemical modification of DNA and other molecules that may be retained as cells divide to make more cells. When found in DNA, methylation can alter gene expression. In this process, chemical tags called methyl groups attach to a particular location within DNA where they turn a gene on or off, thereby regulating the production of proteins that the gene encodes (Institute, National Human Genome Research, 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Diathesis: a constitutional predisposition toward a particular state or condition and especially one that is abnormal or diseased (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023).

This approach underscores the importance of considering both environmental and genetic factors in comprehending suicide risk.

On another front, the exploration of cellular suicide and methylation delves into how cellular processes, including apoptosis (programmed cell death) and DNA methylation, can shape mental disorders and heighten the risk of suicide. It underscores that imbalance in DNA methylation, an epigenetic process regulating gene expression, play a pivotal role in the development of mental health issues and amplify susceptibility to suicide. Research in this realm aims to unravel how these cellular processes contribute to mental conditions associated with suicide. The concept of genetic markers and signalling systems underscores the significance of genetic factors and biochemical signals in the neurobiology of suicidal behaviour. Genetic influence on vulnerability to depression and suicide is explored, and markers like cholesterol and enzyme activity are scrutinized for associations with suicidal behaviour.

Research focused on specific brain areas, such as the frontal lobes, has proven indispensable in comprehending severe depressive disorders. Neuroimaging, offering a detailed glimpse into brain structure, has been instrumental in advancing more effective strategies for suicide prevention and treatment (Cuesta & Salazar, 2015).

Exploring diverse dimensions associated with the risk of suicide, which span from genetic factors to cellular processes, reveals an intrinsic link with the functioning of neurons in the brain. Within this framework, research has zeroed in on neurons, with a particular emphasis on the fascinating “mirror neurons”. Their discovery in the 1980s and 90s by a team of researchers at the University of Parma, led by Giacomo Rizzolatti, marked a significant milestone. These neurons play a fundamental role in experiencing “empathy” enabling individuals to adopt others’ perspectives and internally share their emotional states.

When an individual performs an action, the activation of mirror neurons in their brain creates an internal “copy” of that action. This activation mechanism forms the neurobiological foundation of imitation. In essence, when observing someone else’s action, our mirror neurons urge us to internally replicate that action in our own brain. This process extends beyond the mere physical reproduction of movements to encompass the emulation of emotional states. Witnessing another person’s emotional expression allows our mirror

neurons to internally simulate that emotional experience, contributing to a deeper and richer understanding of the emotional states of others (Rovatti, 2020).

In the context of suicide, empathy assumes a fundamental role. Although this process involves the activation of shared circuits in the brain, there exists the potential for empathic disconnection, especially in traumatic situations or when seeking emotional distance, particularly when confronting the emotionally charged topic of suicide, intertwined with themes of death, sadness, and distress (Pompili, 2015).

## **Psychological Factors**

Within the domain of understanding suicide, the concept of psychological pain transcends mere neurobiology, delving into a complex interplay of biopsychosocial factors. It's essential to grasp that this pain isn't merely intrinsic but springs from the frustration of psychological needs crucial for proper cognitive functioning. The lack of satisfaction of these needs becomes intolerable and triggers a broad range of subjective experiences known as psychological pain (Salazar, Romero, & Campos, 2014).

Acting as a catalyst for this psychological pain, psychosocial crises, in the form of stress, propel individuals beyond mere emotional discomfort into profound suffering. This suffering profoundly impacts the psyche, inducing significant changes in cognitive functions, perceptions, and behaviour. From this vantage point, psychological pain isn't a mere symptom but a foundational driver of suicidal ideation and behaviour. Shneidman, regarded as the father of contemporary suicidology, asserts:

Suicide is caused by psychache (sik-ak; two syllables). Psychache refers to the hurt, anguish, soreness, aching, psychological pain in the psyche, the mind. It is intrinsically psychological – the pain of excessively felt shame, or guilt, or humiliation, or whatever. When it occurs, its reality is introspectively undeniable. Suicide occurs when the psychache is deemed by that person to be unbearable. This means that suicide also has to do with different individual thresholds for enduring psychological pain (Leenaars, 2010, p. 7).

Considering Schopenhauer's perspective, which links suicide to dissatisfaction with life conditions, we can broaden the concept of psychological pain. Dissatisfaction with life and circumstances can contribute to a constant state of psychological discomfort, which, although not always externally evident, can be a determining factor in the decision to commit suicide. The connection between internal situations and physical well-being underscores the complexity of psychological pain, which is not limited to external circumstances but is intrinsically linked to the individual's internal perception and experience.

Within this context, it's vital to note that those contemplating suicide aren't seeking death per se but rather a more gratifying life. Dissatisfaction with current conditions significantly influences the experienced psychological unease. This perspective adds complexity to understanding psychological pain associated with suicide, stressing the need to address both internal distress and external factors contributing to life dissatisfaction. The interplay between internal perception and external circumstances shapes the experience of psychological pain, ultimately influencing decisions regarding life and death, all within a succinct framework (Schopenhauer, 2004).

Furthermore, suicide can be a response to various challenges, such as difficulties in resolving conflicts, painful psychological aftermath resulting from sexual assaults and aggression, and the torment associated with harassment linked to sexual identity disorders. These elements have been recognized as potential catalysts for the psychological anguish that adds to the vulnerability to suicide (Cuesta & Salazar, 2015).

In addition to these external challenges, the susceptibility to entertaining suicidal thoughts is intricately woven with a diverse array of cognitive factors. These factors can be broadly categorized into two main dimensions: cognitive content and processing deficits. Within cognitive content, poignant elements like hopelessness, a waning desire to live, a diminished sense of social support, and the pressure of perfectionism play a prominent role, each identified as significant contributors to the contemplation of suicide. On the flip side, processing deficits encompass cognitive rigidity, challenges in navigating interpersonal issues, impulsive tendencies, and a limited tolerance for stress (Chamorro, 2021).

Beyond these cognitive factors, it's essential to consider the interaction with other psychological elements identified in suicide research. Initially, studies focused on the perception of lack of belonging, feeling like a burden to others, and the acquired ability to engage in suicidal behaviours. However, more recent research has broadened this perspective to include additional components, such as despair and knowledge or familiarity with lethal means.

This evolving understanding of factors linked to suicidal thoughts has also underscored the significance of mediating elements. These factors, entwined with emotional distress, encompass psychological and cognitive traits such as struggles with problem-solving, biases in memory, and persistent rumination. Additionally, immediate-action factors have come into focus, including feelings of defeat and entrapment, intentions and planning, plan implementation, access to means, and exposure to suicidal behaviour in others. Within this intricate context, the nuanced relationship between psychological and cognitive factors intricately weaves with clinical aspects. Conditions like anxiety disorders, impulse control challenges, eating disorders, previous self-harm experiences, as well as alcohol and drug abuse or dependence, can amplify vulnerability to the risk of suicide (Turecki, et al., 2019).

Nevertheless, delving into the nuanced perspective to grasp factors connected to suicide emphasizes the inherent complexity of this phenomenon. Over the years, numerous studies have explored the significant association between mental disorders and suicidal behaviour. It's crucial to underscore that the bold assertion that 90% of individuals who take their own lives have a mental disorder contributes to the stigma associated with viewing suicide as an illness. As mentioned earlier, suicidal acts result from a complex interplay of various cumulative factors that generate intense psychological pain. Some of these factors are linked to underlying mental health issues, while others are associated with stressful life events. It could be likened to a snowball effect, where each element influences another, intensifying suffering and culminating in the final act to end the pain.

Numerous models of suicidal behaviour are grounded in approaches that view mental disorders as a distant predisposition, suggesting that environmental factors or more temporally proximate life events can trigger suicidal crises in the presence of that underlying vulnerability. Consequently, our focus will be on those mental disorders that studies show

have a higher correlation with suicide risk. To understand these mental disorders, we will draw upon information provided by the WHO and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, known as DSM-5, which also defines them as:

A mental disorder is a syndrome characterized by a clinically significant disturbance in an individual's cognitive state, emotional regulation, or behaviour. It reflects dysfunction in the psychological, biological, or developmental processes underlying their mental function. Typically, mental disorders are associated with significant stress or impairment, be it social, occupational, or other important activities (American Psychiatric Association, 2014, p. 20).

Navigating through the intricacies of depressive disorders reveals a nuanced landscape, where depression emerges as a poignant risk factor for suicide. Within this sphere, we encounter diverse expressions, including major depressive disorder, depressive disorder rooted in other medical conditions, substance/medication-induced depressive disorder, and dysthymia or persistent depressive disorder. While these variations exhibit unique features, they converge on a shared essence: a pervasive sense of sadness, emptiness, or irritability, accompanied by transformative somatic and cognitive shifts that profoundly affect an individual's capacity to function.

Major depressive disorder, often considered the archetype of this spectrum, distinguishes itself through the enduring grip of sadness and its associated symptoms. These encompass a waning interest in once-pleasurable activities, disruptions in appetite and sleep patterns, pervasive fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt, cognitive challenges in thinking and decision-making, and the haunting presence of recurrent thoughts about death or suicidal ideation, occasionally escalating to concrete suicide plans or attempts. It's crucial to note that these symptoms must manifest as new or significantly exacerbated compared to the individual's previous state.

The spectre of suicidal thoughts or actions looms persistently throughout the course of a depressive episode. Additional risk factors, including previous suicide attempts, explicit threats, male gender, solitary living, and the experience of profound hopelessness, intensify the vulnerability. When intertwined with borderline personality disorder, the risk of future

suicide attempts experiences a notable escalation. While major depressive disorder stands as a principal contributor to heightened mortality, particularly through suicide, it is not the sole instigator. (American Psychiatric Association, 2014, pp. 155-168).

Bipolar disorder, a complex condition, is divided into two primary categories: Bipolar I disorder and Bipolar II disorder. In the former, the condition is defined by the presence of at least one full-blown manic episode, without the requirement of a prior major depressive episode, deviating from the classical description. Conversely, Bipolar II disorder involves the lifelong experience of at least one major depressive episode, distinguished by the occurrence of hypomanic episodes instead of full manic episodes. Individuals grappling with bipolar disorder navigate between depressive episodes and intervals of manic symptoms. Throughout depressive episodes, an individual contends with a gloomy mood marked by sensations of sadness, irritability, or emptiness, coupled with a pervasive loss of pleasure or interest in daily activities, persisting for most of the day nearly every day. On the flip side, manic symptoms during a manic episode encompass euphoria or irritability, heightened activity or energy, rapid speech, racing thoughts, inflated self-esteem, reduced need for sleep, distractibility, and impulsive and reckless behaviour. It's pivotal to underscore that individuals dealing with bipolar disorder confront a substantially higher risk of suicide, approximately 15 times greater than the general population (World Health Organization, 2022).

Substance-related disorders encompass a diverse array of substances, spanning 10 classes, which include alcohol, caffeine, cannabis, hallucinogens, inhalants, opioids, sedatives, hypnotics, anxiolytics, stimulants, tobacco, and other unknown substances. Despite their unique characteristics, they all share the common trait of directly activating the brain's reward system, inducing pleasure, and leading to problematic consumption patterns. These disorders are divided into substance use disorders and substance-induced disorders. The latter category involves intoxication, withdrawal, and various mental disorders induced by substances or medications, such as psychotic, bipolar, depressive, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, sleep, sexual dysfunction, delirium, and neurocognitive disorders. This spectrum of disorders significantly impacts daily functioning, influencing crucial aspects like work, interpersonal relationships, health, and safety. Individuals grappling with these disorders may

face legal, medical, and social consequences, heightening their susceptibility to accidents, violence, and, in extreme cases, suicide (American Psychiatric Association, 2014, p. 481).

In addition to substance-induced disorders, anxiety emerges as a fundamental element at the intersection of mental disorders and suicidal behaviour. There is a likelihood that anxiety contributes to the risk of suicide by interacting with other characteristics in individuals already vulnerable. Longitudinal research underscores the intricate relationship between anxiety, impulsivity, and suicidal behaviour, especially within specific demographic groups. Clinical factors such as anxiety disorders, impulse control, and post-traumatic stress disorder have been demonstrated to play a crucial role in the transition from suicidal ideation to actual suicide attempts (Turecki, et al., 2019).

Furthermore, other mental disorders, including eating disorders, schizophrenia, and borderline personality disorders, have been identified as potential contributors to an increased risk of suicide. A comprehensive analysis conducted by the *Journal of Affective Disorders*, delving into the connection between mental disorders and suicide through record linkage studies, reveals a noteworthy finding: preventing mental disorders could significantly impact the reduction of up to 21% of suicide cases. This underscores the imperative need to address mental health comprehensively as an integral component of suicide prevention strategies (Too, et al., 2019, p. 311).

## **Sociological Factors**

A society is formed through the shared norms, beliefs, and culture of individuals who engage in mutual interaction. As social beings, humans have an inherent need to belong and contribute to the collective. In the 19th century, sociologist Émile Durkheim tackled the issue of suicide as a social concern, centring his focus on factors related to integration into society rather than adopting an individualistic perspective of the act. Durkheim believed it was crucial to comprehend the causes that lead someone to take their own life. For instance, he excluded individuals who performed sacrifices, such as a mother with her child, from the classification of suicide. Consequently, individual causes did not provide a complete

explanation for the phenomenon; it was imperative to consider social factors. These “fundamentally were of a sociological nature and stemmed from social pressure. Society imprints its influence on individuals, moulding their actions and thoughts. Social pressure holds relevance, as the distribution of distinct suicide rates varies depending on different social groups” (Scaglia & García, 2000, p. 33).

Delving into the societal fabric, Durkheim, in his exploration of the social landscape of his time, focused on understanding the social causes behind the intricate phenomenon of suicide. Through his insightful research, he developed a classification that highlights three significant types of social suicides: egoistic, altruistic, and anomic.

Egoistic suicide unfolds from a context of social disconnection and an escalating individual focus, leaving the person feeling detached from any societal or communal bonds. This unfolds as diminishing social interaction and a loss of social structure, ushering in a disintegration where individuals grapple with a profound sense of detachment. The stability provided by the family environment is crucial, provided its composition is affectionate and appropriate; otherwise, there is a risk of cohesion lacking. Additionally, religion plays a fundamental role in mitigating the risk of egoistic suicide, not so much due to its dogmas but for its ability to make people feel part of a larger group.

In contrast, altruistic suicide occurs when adherence to societal norms or beliefs reaches such a high degree that the individual disregards their own personal desires. In this type of suicide, the decision to take one’s life is made for the sake of society’s well-being or due to an extreme adherence to the group’s traditions and customs, without questioning if it is truly their own choice. Although this type of suicide is considered almost obsolete in contemporary society, the military can be seen as a contemporary example of altruistic suicide, as they sacrifice themselves for the common good of the people and believe that their act contributes to social order and stability.

Concluding this sociological exploration is anomic suicide, intricately linked to the absence of stability and certainty in society. Durkheim astutely notes that during economic upheavals or anomalous situations disrupting established norms, individuals grapple with feelings of disconnection and hopelessness. In times of normalcy, society is perceived as equitable, with individuals accepting norms as moral guideposts steering their behaviour.

Yet, in times of crises or seismic shifts, this perception fractures, and society struggles to effectively play its role as a moral compass. Durkheim underscores the importance of individual needs aligning with the resources available for happiness. The challenge arises when individuals harbour the belief that their desires are boundless, leading them to set unattainable goals. This ceaseless pursuit of satisfaction breeds frustration as expectations outpace reality, fostering heightened and even aggressive competition. The absence of adherence to traditional rules further fuels this scenario, fostering a demanding populace less inclined to adhere to established norms. This disjunction between expectations and reality, exacerbated by the dearth of social regulation, becomes fertile ground for the sprouting of suicidal thoughts and attitudes (Durkheim, 1928).

Building on Durkheim's perspective, various factors such as heredity and temperature were investigated, yet it was determined that they don't play a decisive role in the discussed phenomenon. For instance, in the case of heredity, its influence spans all stages of an individual's life, unrestricted by a specific age or circumstance. Concerning temperature, any observed rise in mortality rates during specific months is more linked to prevalent social activities in that period than to temperature fluctuations per se. However, a noteworthy pattern emerged concerning imitation.

Durkheim, in his quest to offer a social explanation, scrutinized the concept of imitative suicide. He concluded that while the imitation of suicidal behaviours may be noticeable among individuals, its impact on a societal scale remains limited. He underscores that this imitation might affect individual cases but doesn't significantly contribute to the overall configuration of suicide rates. He suggests that the aspects associated with imitation are largely imaginary, and although it may result in repetitions within confined circles, its influence never extends widely or profoundly enough to substantially alter the social fabric (Durkheim, 1928). Within his reflections, Durkheim notes, "Certain authors, who attribute to imitation a power it does not possess, have called for newspapers to be prohibited from reporting on suicides and crimes" (Quote: Aubry. *Contagion du meurtre* First edition p. 87 (Durkheim, 1928, p. 128)). Faced with this proposal, he remains sceptical about its potential to significantly alter the overall social statistics, arguing that the moral condition of social groups would not experience substantial changes due to such a prohibition. However, in

examining Durkheim's study, certain limitations have been noted. Pope, in analysing Durkheim's work, concluded that he had not adequately supported the imitation hypothesis. According to Pope, it is not the geographical pattern that determines whether the process is underway, but rather whether one person's suicide triggers others (Wasserman, 1984).

It's worth noting that throughout the years, suicide has been portrayed in literature and art with a certain degree of heroism or romanticism. There's a subtle romantic allure to the notion of having control over the timing of one's own death. However, this artistic representation can also evoke an emotional resonance in society, contributing to an uptick in suicide rates, a phenomenon known as the Werther effect. This concept traces back to an incident sparked by the 1774 publication of Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In this novel, the protagonist tragically takes his own life due to unrequited love, an act that several young individuals would subsequently replicate, inspired by the narrative. Even though "widespread imitation of Werther's suicide was never conclusively demonstrated, authorities were sufficiently apprehensive to ban the book in several areas, including Italy, Leipzig, and Copenhagen" (Phillips, 1974, p. 340).

Another clear example of how a tragic tale turned into myth occurred in Paris, a century later, with *L'Inconnue de la Seine*. This legend tells the story of a woman presumed to have died by suicide who was found in the river Seine with a beautiful and tranquil face as if she were sleeping. The impact was such that someone decided to create death masks with her face, inspiring not only the art of the time but also generating cinematic adaptations that heightened the mystery and drama surrounding her. The cult that burgeoned around this captivating tale seized the imagination of numerous young individuals grappling with melancholy at the time, though no reports substantiate an upswing in suicide rates. The influence of *L'Inconnue de la Seine* transcended its temporal confines, leaving an enduring imprint on the culture and creativity of that society (Alvarez, 1972).

These instances vividly highlight the significance of narrative and the underlying story within the act of suicide. It is not merely about death itself, but the narrative that unveils the reasons why the "character" grappling with negative emotions decides to end psychological pain. As noted earlier, empathy, by allowing us to feel what the other person experiences and

fostering identification, heightens persuasion. This, in turn, can trigger an imitation phenomenon.

## **Suicide and Media**

Expanding upon the Werther effect, inquiries began emerging about the impact of narrative, not solely within literature or art but also within the realm of media, on the contagion of suicide. Various studies, encompassing both fictional and real-life stories, have predominantly indicated that media coverage of suicides can indeed elevate suicide rates. A trailblazer in this domain, David Phillips, scrutinized post-war suicides featured in prominent headlines of major U.S. and London newspapers. The study probed into various facets, including the temporal alignment of suicides concerning published stories and the fluctuation in the magnitude of the effect based on the degree of publicity in newspapers. The aim is to comprehend the roots of the Werther Effect, not solely in terms of numerical escalation but also in its influence on suicide attempt rates or death by suicide through suggestion.

Among the findings, it is suggested that anomie<sup>11</sup> individuals may be particularly susceptible to suicide when the notion of suicide has been widely publicized. Additionally, Phillips agrees that Durkheim was correct in asserting that the impact of suggestion is very small when it comes to suicide. However, contrary to this perspective, its impact is not limited to the local context, especially when the person who dies by suicide is a celebrity. These figures have a more pronounced international impact, as seen in the case of Marilyn Monroe. After her death, suicides increased by 12% in the subsequent month in the United States and by 107% in England and Wales over a two-month period, with a total of 303 additional suicides in the U.S. and sixty in England and Wales (Phillips, 1974). This phenomenon can be attributed to the repetition and extensive media coverage of the event,

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<sup>11</sup> Anomie, in societies or individuals, is a state of instability arising from a breakdown of standards and values or a lack of purpose. Coined by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, the term suggests that a specific type of suicide (anomic) results from the collapse of social standards that regulate behaviour. In an anomic state, common values break down, new meanings are absent, and, according to Durkheim, individuals may experience feelings of futility, purposelessness, and emotional emptiness. Striving becomes futile when there is no accepted definition of what is desirable.

along with the identification and empathy generated by the media's connection with the deceased individual. Additionally, the narrative constructed around the incident also plays a fundamental role. For instance, stories involving group or mass suicides or those in which the person affects others before taking their own life (as in the case of murder-suicide) do not seem to have an imitative effect (Gould, 2001). According to a study by Steven Stack, who reviewed 55 studies addressing the effects of the media, specific factors were identified to explain certain inconsistencies in the results of non-fictional media contagion. For example, he found that studies focusing on articles mentioning celebrities, politically prominent figures, or deceased women were five times more likely to demonstrate effects compared to other studies.

In another impactful scenario, a guide known as "Final Exit", tailored for individuals grappling with severe illness and contemplating suicide, recommended asphyxiation as the preferred method. Following its publication, the rate of suicides by asphyxiation in New York City surged by 313%, escalating from eight to 33 cases in the subsequent year. Notably, a copy of "Final Exit" was discovered at the scene of 27% of these suicides (Stack, 2003, p. 238).

Keith Hawton conducted a study in England to examine cases of Paracetamol poisoning following an episode of the television series "Casualty" depicting a suicide attempt using the same method. Comparing the weeks after the episode with the three preceding weeks, there was a 17% increase in drug overdose suicide attempts in the first week and a 9% increase in the second week. Approximately 20% of individuals who carried out the poisoning admitted to having watched the program, and within this group, 20% acknowledged that the broadcast had influenced their choice of method. It was assumed that others might have been aware of the program or watched it but chose not to acknowledge its influence or were unaware of it. Concerning fictional products, a prospective study by Gould and Shaffer examined suicide rates after the release of three movies. They found increases in rates in the weeks following the release of two of the three movies. Those that showed an increase focused on the deceased, while the ones that did not show an increase concentrated more on grieving parents than the deceased. Instead of idealizing the deceased, a focus on the devastating consequences for the grieving family could deter some suicidal acts.

Although, according to a study by Stack, real stories have a greater impact, fiction can also lead us to a state of identification generated by empathy (Sudak & Sudak, 2005, p. 496).

Moreover, it has been observed that prior suicidal behaviour can shape the impact of such influences. Individuals with a history of suicide attempts exhibit distinct physiological responses when exposed to media portrayals of fictional suicides. Those who have attempted suicide not only reported greater exposure to fictional suicide depictions but also harboured more imitation fantasies compared to individuals who have not attempted suicide.

While research on the specific traits of individuals more prone to imitating suicide remains limited, age and gender are highlighted for their unique effects. Adolescents seem more susceptible to the influences emanating from suicide narratives, and the most significant reduction in suicides during a news-free period was noted among younger women. Although there is no conclusive evidence suggesting one gender is more vulnerable than the other, the identification with the story of a woman who died by suicide may prompt other women with similar circumstances to contemplate imitation. This phenomenon extends beyond gender distinctions, encompassing various shared experiences and personal circumstances. For instance, a young man facing challenges akin to the narrative, such as emotional struggles or societal pressures, may feel a more profound connection, thereby heightening the likelihood of being influenced in his behaviour (Gould, 2001).

Conclusive evidence regarding the media's influence on imitation still eludes us, making it challenging to confidently assert a direct connection. However, drawing from media theories discussed in the introductory chapter, it becomes apparent that a degree of suggestive power exists. It's crucial to recognize that this phenomenon hinges on factors such as the recipient's attentiveness, emotional disposition, and mental health.

As we have explored, storytelling emerges as a powerful mechanism to establish an emotional connection through identification and the ability to understand and share another person's feelings. "In journalism, it becomes a more dynamic and detailed description of reality. In such way, journalism storytelling is a peculiar tool to create a model of social reality" (Amangeldiyeva, Toktagazin, Omarov, Tapanova, & Nurtazina, 2020, p. 3166).

This technique can be employed in both directions, either to craft narratives that may lead to imitation or, more constructively, for prevention and destigmatization. In this context,

a study conducted by Sallyanne Duncan of the University of Strathclyde and Ann Luce of Bournemouth University tackled and proposed the idea of employing storytelling as a method to teach journalists to ethically communicate about events related to suicide. Coined *Responsible Suicide Reporting* (RSR), this approach comprises three pivotal steps. Initially, identifying the type of suicide story, encompassing narratives motivated by tributes to commemorative actions. In the second step, four essential ethical rules are applied, prohibiting sensationalism, stigmatization, glorification, and gratuitous disclosure of information. The third step involves implementing a moderation standard through six questions that journalists must pose to assess the ethics of their reporting. Results from the study revealed that the use of storytelling proved valuable for students, fostering empathy, and encouraging active learning in the ethical approach to journalistic coverage related to suicide (Duncan & Luce, 2020).

Additionally, it has been observed that effective communication can have preventive effects and reduce the risk of imitation. Results from various studies analysing news or communicative products from both perspectives have led some countries to adopt media guidelines in line with recommendations from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP). Despite these efforts, there is still a lack of commitment, and the adoption of these general guidelines may vary based on the cultural experiences of each country.

A compelling instance of successful guideline implementation unfolded in Vienna between 1983 and 1986. During this period, there was a pronounced surge in metro suicides directly correlated with intensive media coverage. In response, the Austrian Association for Suicide Prevention initiated a campaign in 1987 to reshape the quantity and manner of reporting on metro suicides. These guidelines were enacted the same year, signifying a pivotal shift in media practices: newspapers refrained from detailing suicide methods, such as jumping in front of the metro. Consequently, suicide rates in the metro plummeted by 80% in the subsequent six months and sustained at lower levels. In the era of sensationalist coverage, as many as nine metro suicides were documented every six months. However, following the cessation of such coverage, this figure significantly dropped, fluctuating between one and four suicides in the same timeframe. Although overall suicide statistics in

Austria experienced a marginal decrease, the established guidelines were deemed a probable factor in the specific reduction of cases in the metro, underscoring the potential for individuals to alter their methods in response to shifts in media narratives (Stack, 2003; Sudak & Sudak, 2005).

In this stage of our investigation, we have meticulously explored the profound impact of narrative on shaping perceptions and responses to the phenomenon of suicide. Drawing from historical instances such as the “Werther effect” and contemporary cases, we’ve observed the potential of artistic and media representations to evoke emotional responses and, in certain instances, prompt imitation. The emotional connection and identification fostered by a compelling narrative emerge as essential elements in the intricate process of social contagion. It is crucial to recognize the nuanced nature of this phenomenon, understanding that imitation is neither a linear nor a uniform process. Interconnected factors (individual, social, and cultural) play critical roles in interpreting and responding to these narratives. While we have delved into the suggestive power embedded in media representations, it is equally vital to consider the emotional and mental state of the recipient as an integral component in this dynamic equation. Furthermore, we’ve underscored the critical importance of how suicides are dramatized and reported. Instances of exaggeration, unjust blame, or oversimplified causation can yield adverse effects, contributing to the romanticization of certain suicides and fostering a contagion effect. Additionally, the oversight of factors like depression and mental illness can distort the public’s understanding of the multifaceted causes of suicide. These insights emphasize the imperative need to approach this subject with sensitivity and discernment, acknowledging the media’s responsibility in both preventing contagion and destigmatizing suicide.

### **Suicide in the Digital Age**

As we explore the intricate connection between the “Werther effect” and new media, fundamental questions arise regarding the influence of these media on social perception, particularly within the field of mental health. The impact of the “Werther effect” extends

beyond traditional media, giving rise to increasing concerns in the era of new digital media. This phenomenon, originally manifested in classical works, has undergone evolution, and interweaved with our current virtual landscape. Immersed in this dynamic, we reflect on the influence that new media wield over social perception.

In terms of its impact, the remediation in digital media has unleashed unprecedented freedom for expressing opinions. This openness has fostered a diversity of perspectives that, when scrutinizing the media's impact on social perception, emerges as a potent and sometimes challenging force. Within this context of freedom of expression, the connection between the virtual world and reality becomes more apparent. "Suicide, ranked as the second leading cause of death globally among individuals aged 15 to 29, is directly influenced by the impact of digital media. In some instances, these media even contribute to the act, revealing a complex relationship between media influence and suicide rates, supported by various studies" (Pourmand, et al., 2019, pp. 880-881). How it states the study titled *Multi-class machine classification of suicide-related communication on Twitter* (2017):

Concerns about suicide-related communication in social media assume that statements of suicidality within social media platforms are indicators of actual suicidal distress in vulnerable individuals who are posting this material, therefore the affective quality of suicide talk in social media needs to be identified and perhaps responded to. There is some limited evidence of an association between online exposure to suicide-related material and offline suicidal ideation (Burnap, Colombo, Amery, Hodorog, & Scourfield, 2017, p. 32).

In addressing these questions, let's examine whether social media exhibits the Werther effect. In Japan, a study analysed emotional responses on Twitter and their correlation with actual suicide rates. The findings disclose that expressing surprise at a suicide is notably linked to a heightened rate of real suicides, underscoring surprise as a pivotal element in the mechanism of the "Werther effect" (Fahey, Matsubayashi, & Ueda, 2018).

Furthermore, building upon this research, the study on *Multi-class Machine Classification of Suicide-related Communication on Twitter* (Burnap, Colombo, Amery, Hodorog, & Scourfield, 2017) unveiled a notable upswing in the volume of messages and

discussions concerning suicide, particularly in the aftermath of high-profile events. This trend was especially pronounced in response to the deaths of celebrities, such as the case of Robin Williams. This observation suggests that key events, such as the loss of well-known public figures, wield a considerable influence on the articulation and discourse surrounding suicidal thoughts online. The social media audience tends to respond fervently to such occurrences, sharing their emotions, thoughts, and reminiscences. Consequently, the intricate interplay between surprise, as underscored in the Japanese study, and the impact of critical events on social media underscores the inherent complexity within the social dynamics associated with the online discussion of suicide.

This revelation emphasizes the pressing need to explore how to effectively leverage this dynamic as a preventive tool for timely interventions. Several challenges arise when conducting studies on social media, ranging from sample size issues to the difficulty in verifying the authenticity of user information. Additionally, the constant evolution of the digital environment adds an extra layer of complexity. The dynamic and shape-shifting nature of the internet further heightens challenges related to information governance on the network, amplifying the difficulty of managing and regulating the flow of data effectively in the virtual realm.

In this scenario, a fundamental question emerges: do adequate policies exist to govern information online and prevent instances of cyber-suicide<sup>12</sup>? These policies should not only address the relevance of information but also emphasize the vital necessity to monitor and verify the content disseminated across the web. Confronted with this reality, it becomes paramount to underscore the legislative deficiency in managing information linked to high-risk themes such as suicidal ideation, self-harm, or suicidal behaviour. Regulating websites and blogs containing detailed content on suicide methodology presents challenges akin to those encountered in overseeing media coverage of these events. Nevertheless, the prospect of eliminating or restricting access to these sites introduces ethical quandaries. Such measures could be perceived as encroachments on freedom of expression and the press, running counter to the fundamental tenet of the internet: unrestricted access to information without

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<sup>12</sup> Cyber-suicide: is a term used in reference to suicide and its ideations on the Internet. Cyber-suicide is associated with websites that lure vulnerable members of society and empower them with various methods and approaches to deliberate self-harm (Birbal, et al., 2009).

the need for organizational affiliation. This intricate dichotomy poses a challenge to the regulation of online content without compromising the foundational principles of liberty in the digital sphere.

The issue of anonymity and the management of data privacy on social media is also tackled, recognizing the major importance of the gathered information, which could be decisive for saving lives. When examining specific cases, such as that of a 13-year-old girl who shared suicidal images on her social media account set as “private”, questions arise about a potential privacy violation by not obtaining the patient’s direct consent to access content considered private, even though she is a minor. This scenario gives rise to ethical considerations regarding the exposure of sensitive information. As emphasized by Pourmand and colleagues, “Although there is enacted legislation regarding privacy on social media and the handling of protected health information (PHI) separately, no legislation addressing the intersection of the two currently exists” (Pourmand, et al., 2019, p. 884).

These challenges have seen a notable increase with the surge in the use and development of new digital platforms. Nevertheless, concurrently, these platforms have also been harnessed as preventive tools, notwithstanding the potential risks involved. This aspect holds particular significance for young individuals, who frequently present difficulties in engaging with more traditional treatment methods (Robinson, et al., 2016, p. 104).

Social media provides a space where young individuals can express the mental distress they undergo, which, due to the fear of judgment or social discrediting, they may not feel capable of sharing in other environments. As stated by Dominic Yeo in his paper *Do You Know How Much I Suffer?* (2021, p. 1608):

As depressive symptoms worsen, young people are less likely to talk to someone about mental health problems and more likely to withdraw from help. Scholars argue that understanding young people’s mental distress and developing suitable interventions entail acknowledging their viewpoints and considering their lived experiences. Accordingly, many studies have examined the stories of young people with mental health problems to access their experiences through their own perspectives and words.

This study examined 136 anonymous personal narratives focused on self-harming behaviours or suicidal thoughts on a “secrets” page on Facebook targeting students in Hong Kong. These narratives highlighted the secrets, grievances, and uncertainties related to the mental health of distressed youth, unveiling their invisible struggle against life challenges and mental health issues. Narrators found in social media a channel to release frustrations and seek support. The study underscores the significance of comprehending the sociocultural conditions contributing to the silence surrounding the distress of young individuals. Instead of remaining silent, these individuals opted to share their experiences on social media, resisting invalidation through exposure, clarification, and testimony. The argument is made that mental health intervention efforts should take these conditions into account and avoid positive biases that might worsen distress. Additionally, the relevance of storytelling as a tool for providing communicative resilience is highlighted, enabling narrators to counteract the invisibility and disqualification of their suffering through disclosure, clarification, and testimony (Yeo, 2021).

Amidst this intricate tapestry of challenges and opportunities linked to the influence of social media on the perception and prevention of suicide, it is imperative to delve into varied perspectives and experiences that contribute to this phenomenon. Thus far, we have explored how the element of surprise regarding suicide and the impact of critical events can deeply shape the dynamics of social media and public perception.

However, beyond these aspects, it is essential to consider how users themselves and stakeholders perceive and utilize social media in relation to suicide prevention. In the paper titled *social media and suicide prevention: findings from a stakeholder survey* (Robinson, Rodrigues, Fisher, Bailey, & Herrman, 2015), online surveys were conducted targeting researchers, organizations, and social media users. This study shed light on perceptions, benefits, and risks associated with online interaction in situations of suicidal risk, providing valuable insights that complement our understanding of the topic.

Among the identified benefits was the capability for swift intervention when someone expressed suicidal feelings or posted a suicide note online. Additionally, the highlighted capacity of individuals to utilize social media as a secure and supportive space to articulate their emotions and receive support from those with similar experiences was noteworthy.

Respondents underscored the value of social media not only as a platform for seeking help but also as a medium for extending support to others. This finding aligns with the outcomes of a previous study, which indicated that social media users perceive the ability to assist others as having therapeutic value. Furthermore, the creation of a virtual community fostering a sense of belonging and mutual identification can be facilitated. However, among the identified risks, it was observed that few expressed concerns about imitation, with more focus on the perceived inadequacy of site moderators to offer effective and appropriate support to individuals at risk, primarily due to a lack of clear safety protocols or ethical codes.

Finally, a significant risk that has extended into the virtual sphere is violence. Presently, platforms such as Facebook and Twitter have evolved into environments conducive to the perpetration of violent acts among young individuals. These acts encompass everything from harassment, bullying, and aggression in the context of dating to involvement in online gangs, reaching the extreme of cyber-suicide (Patton, et al., 2014). Although understanding the root causes remains challenging, it is essential to acknowledge that, while these spaces can provide a voice and support, they also have the potential to worsen the situation for those already in a state of vulnerability, further isolating those who need help the most.

In conclusion, as we delve into the impact of social media on the perception of suicide, it becomes clear that these platforms wield a powerful influence in disseminating information and shaping opinions. They have significantly expanded the reach and speed at which stories and experiences related to suicide are shared, igniting debates about their role in promoting suicidal behaviours. The correlation between critical events, such as the loss of public figures, and the profound online reactions underscores the importance of understanding how social media moulds the collective perception of these delicate issues. As we navigate the intricate relationship between social media and mental health in the context of suicide, it is fundamental to acknowledge the evolving nature of storytelling in this landscape.

## **Narratives of Despair**

Throughout history, storytelling has undergone a remarkable metamorphosis, transitioning from a simple form of entertainment to a powerful vehicle for exploring the intricate depths of the human experience. This evolution owes much to the advent of new multimedia resources, which have revolutionized storytelling in unprecedented ways, transcending the constraints of traditional media. As we've discussed, the manner in which a story is conveyed holds substantial sway over its audience, capable of both positively and negatively influencing them. Depending on the narrative approach chosen and its resonance with the audience, it can either exacerbate the risk of imitation or serve as an innovative tool for mental health awareness, potentially reshaping societal perspectives.

Despite changes in storytelling mediums, the exploration of suicide's tragic dimensions has persisted across various narrative platforms. This enduring theme, as noted by Booker (2004, p. 329), often unfolds within a framework offering two distinct resolutions to achieve narrative closure. On one trajectory, we witness a satisfying arc where the protagonist triumphs over adversity, attains their aspirations, and often finds happiness and love. Conversely, there's the less optimistic trajectory, where the character confronts personal tragedy, teetering on the edge of despair, and, in some instances, resorting to suicide as an escape.

The potency of these tragic denouements lies in their direct engagement with the painful and perplexing nature of suicide from an external perspective. However, these narratives also captivate by offering insights into the internal and external struggles of characters, as well as the inherent complexities of human existence. Through such storytelling, writers delve into themes like alienation, loss, despair, and hopelessness, shedding light on the harsh realities confronted by many individuals in real life.

Continuing along this train of thought, Booker (2004, p. 156) delineated five common stages found in tragedies, each depicting an emotional journey that begins with the stage of dream, where the protagonist revels in a sense of fulfilment and contentment with their life. However, this tranquillity is swiftly threatened as the first obstacles emerge to destabilize their happiness in the stage of frustration. With time, the situation deteriorates further into

the stage of nightmare, where challenges become overwhelming, and the protagonist struggles desperately to maintain composure. Subsequently, in the stage of downfall, they reach their nadir, confronting the repercussions of their actions as tragedy looms ominously. Finally, in the stage of resolution, the fate of the protagonist is sealed, whether through finding redemption or sinking deeper into despair, thus marking the culmination of this tragic narrative. Essentially, this narrative entails recounting a story in reverse, where each event exacerbates the character's decline. This genre finds particular resonance in themes like suicide, akin to comedy, due to its versatility in storytelling, as we will explore later.

Within classical tragedies, certain recurring elements enrich and complicate the narratives, with one of the most prominent being the concept of the "fatal flaw". This term denotes an inherent weakness or tragic imperfection within the protagonist, precipitating their own undoing. This flaw can manifest in myriad ways: as a deeply ingrained personality trait, a fateful decision, or even a specific action throughout the narrative arc. Regardless of its manifestation, the fatal flaw is pivotal to the tragic structure of the story, propelling the conflict forward and ultimately steering the protagonist towards their tragic destiny.

The tragic hero, consequently, becomes enmeshed in a state of incompleteness or immaturity because of their fatal flaw, leading them to distance themselves from others or sever their social and emotional ties. While grappling with the repercussions of their actions and wrestling with their tragic destiny, they may find themselves emotionally estranged from those around them. This sense of isolation and solitude deepens the narrative's tragedy and despair. Take, for instance, the character of Anna in *Anna Karenina*. Her fatal flaw manifests in her relentless pursuit of a passion and love she believes absent in her marriage to Karenin. This pursuit leads her into a passionate affair with Count Vronsky, defying societal norms and enduring rejection and scrutiny. As her relationship with Vronsky intensifies, Anna's fatal flaw becomes increasingly apparent. Despite finding the passion she craves, her obsession consumes her, causing her to neglect her familial duties and isolate herself from her husband and son. Her detachment from her former life and inability to find fulfilment in her new love plunge her into despair, ultimately culminating in her tragic suicide.

On the contrary, the protagonist's ego emerges as an essential factor driving the tragic narrative forward. It can compel the central character to make fatal misjudgements due to a

disconnection from their authentic self or from the archetypal forces shaping their destiny. This dissonance often precipitates tragic choices, self-destructive behaviours, or an obsessive pursuit of selfish desires, all of which serve to deepen the tragedy's impact.

A striking illustration can be found in Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*. In this masterpiece, Werther is portrayed as a profoundly idealistic and emotionally fervent young man, whose ego inflates the purity of his love for Charlotte and his own emotional and intellectual superiority. However, when he learns of Charlotte's engagement to another man, he descends into profound anguish. His subjective narration mirrors his ego, with intense emotions dominating the narrative. Incapable of reconciling himself to rejection, he stubbornly clings to his unattainable love for Charlotte, spiralling into despair that culminates in his tragic decision to end his life, knowing she is forever beyond his reach.

The profound connection with the main character and their suffering was pivotal in framing their suicide as an act of love, a portrayal that subsequently inspired numerous imitations. The interplay among the fatal flaw, ego, and tragedy not only enriches the narrative but also deepens our understanding of the human condition in moments of extreme distress. However, this intimate engagement with the storyline and empathy toward its characters can inadvertently heighten susceptibility to imitation, underscoring the necessity of addressing such themes with both sensitivity and responsibility in storytelling.

Therefore, while traditional narratives often gravitate towards depicting the protagonist's personal tragedy and eventual suicide, it is imperative to recognize that storytelling offers a vast and varied terrain capable of presenting diverse perspectives and outcomes through various narrative techniques.

By embracing this diversity, we can present suicide in a more nuanced and realistic light, acknowledging its multifaceted impacts and consequences. For instance, by delving into the profound devastation that suicide inflicts upon the family and their journey through grief, we can dispel the romanticized or valorised notions surrounding this act, revealing the intricate layers of pain it leaves in its wake. This perspective, while honouring the individual's emotional turmoil leading to suicide, prompts reflection on its broader ramifications, fostering empathy and connection with other characters who are affected.



## Chapter III

### Representations of Suicide in Contemporary Mexican Culture

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), global suicide rates have seen a decline over the past two decades (2000-2019), except for the Americas, where there has been a notable increase of 17% during that period. Mexico stands out as one of the countries experiencing a significant surge, documenting a continuous rise of 16% in the last decade. This disturbing trend has propelled suicide to become the third leading cause of death among Mexican youth, particularly exacerbated during the pandemic year, reaching a critical point in 2021 with a rate of 6.5 (INEGI, 2023; Ruiz, 2021; World Health Organization, 2021).

To comprehend the underlying causes of this increase, the chapter draws on criminological theories that illuminate the social dynamics in Mexico<sup>13</sup>. “Experts attribute the escalating suicide rates to factors such as isolation, stress, violence, bullying, and uncertainty about the future, collectively fostering a pervasive sense of hopelessness among children and young people” (Sánchez, Bustamante, Guzmán, Andrade, & Vargas, 2021, p. 1). In this concerning scenario, the most recent report from the National Institute of Statistics and Geography of Mexico reveals that suicide rates for 2022 were 6.3 per-100,000 inhabitants (8,123 cases). Although this represents an increase of 1,629 more suicides compared to those that occurred in 2017, it is important to highlight a decrease compared to the previous year (2021) (INEGI, 2023, p. 1). Furthermore, it's crucial to recognize that for every 20 suicide attempts, there is one completed suicide (Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social, 2022). Moreover, it's imperative to acknowledge the inherent challenges in obtaining precise figures on suicide rates, as discussed in the article *Questions of culture, age, and gender in the epidemiology of suicide* (2003):

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<sup>13</sup> For a comprehensive exploration of Mexico, consider the following references: Navarro, 2007; Ortiz-Hernández, 2005; Valdez & Juárez, 1998; Sloan, 2017; WHO, 2021; Morfin-López, 2018; Borges, et al., 2009; Borges, Orozco, Benjet, & Medina-Mora, 2010.

The rate is likely considerably higher “because classifying a death as suicide carries negative emotional, religious, legal, and financial implications. Consequently, aggregated statistics must always be presumed to be underreporting the true incidence. Individual police officers and health officials, as well as local jurisdictions and entire nations, will differ in the quantity and criteria by which they underreport cases of suicide” (Rudmin, Ferrada-Noli, & Skolbekken, 2003, p. 373).

Reviewing the significance of cultural factors in society, we revisit Durkheim’s concept of anomie to shed light on the workings of Mexican society and its correlation with the escalating suicide rates. The absence of clearly defined social norms can induce disorientation among residents, fostering a sense of disconnection between them.

According to the article *What Explains Criminal Violence in Mexico City? A Test of Two Theories of Crime* (Vilalta & Muggah, 2016, p. 5), the theory of institutional anomie posits that “cultural structures – defined as sets of normative values – can contribute to a condition of moral decay, the erosion of bonds between individuals in a community, and fragmentation and declining self-regulation”. Among the factors fuelling this phenomenon, the lack of preventive and social reintegration policies is notable, along with the inefficacy of institutions in addressing internal conflicts and tackling economic disparities. In Mexico, for instance, “impunity, linked to the negligence in attending, investigating, and resolving cases known to authorities, increases each year. Essentially, only four out of every 100 crimes are investigated, according to the research centre” (Forbes staff, 2023, p. 1).

Viewed through the lens of social disorganization theory, it becomes apparent that the expansion of urban populations, the disintegration of households, socioeconomic segregation, migration, and the diversity in ethnicity and spatial distribution, along with the low and indifferent civic engagement, collectively contribute to the rise in crime rates. These factors weaken social bonds, consequently diminishing the capacity of communities to self-regulate, monitor the behaviour of their members, and ultimately erode social cohesion (Vilalta & Muggah, 2016, p. 4).

Both theories provide a comprehensive explanation for the upsurge in violence in Mexico. However, it is imperative to underscore the central role played by drug trafficking

groups in the country. Operating outside legal boundaries and corrupting institutions, these groups significantly contribute to the creation of an anomalous environment. The influence wielded by these narcotic organizations leads to the breakdown of social structures and a pervasive distrust in institutions tasked with maintaining order and ensuring citizen security. This heightened context, compounded by rampant impunity and the unresolved cases known to authorities, fosters an increasingly unfavourable landscape. It not only contributes to impulsive behaviours, substance abuse, and an elevated risk of suicidal tendencies but also perpetuates a vicious cycle of violence and societal disorder in Mexican society.

A thorough exploration of complex cultural phenomena is essential. Geert Hofstede, a Dutch sociologist, and cultural psychologist dedicated his research to developing cultural dimensions to measure and analyse intercultural interactions, particularly within organizational settings. While some academics express reservations about the completeness of information in these dimensions, they nonetheless serve as a valuable tool for understanding and comparing countries. This affords a clearer insight into their structural functioning as societies, facilitating a deeper comprehension of their cultural and social dynamics. The six cultural dimensions Hofstede refers to are: power distance, individualism/collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity and femininity, long-term/short-term, and indulgence/restraint.

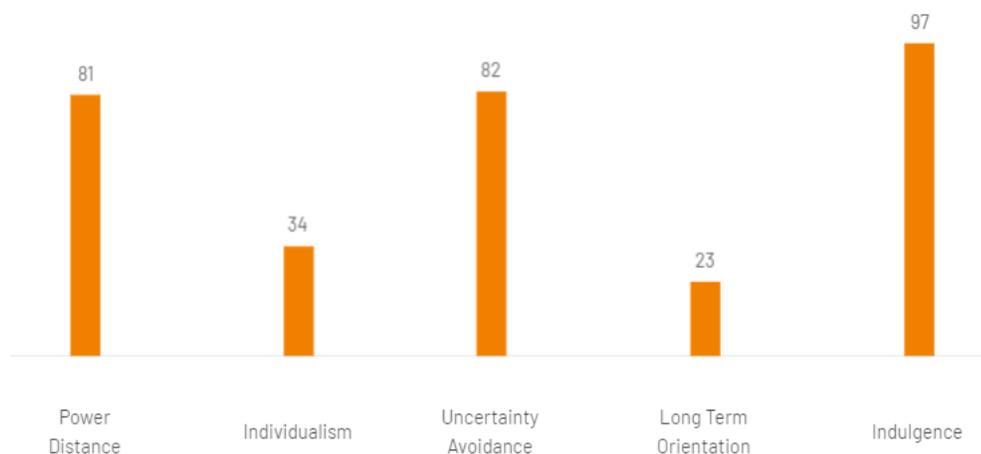


Figure 1. The values that Mexico obtained in Hofstede's cultural dimensions. Image sourced from (Hofstede Insights, 2024).

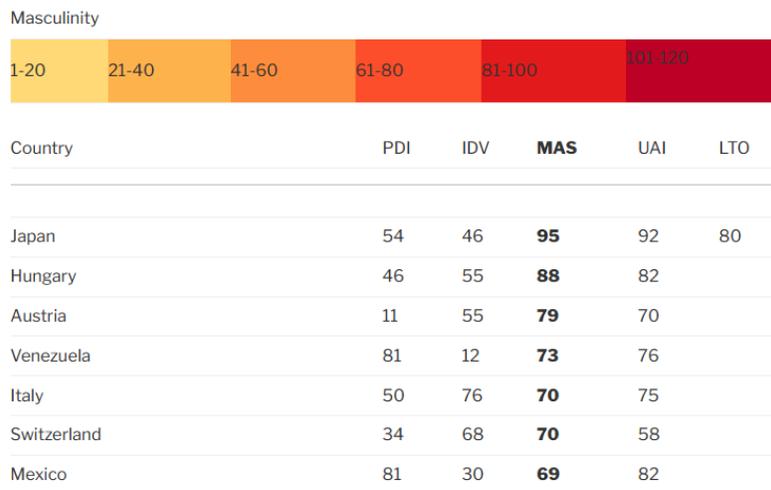


Figure 2. The value that Mexico obtained in Hofstede’s cultural dimension of Masculinity and Femininity. Image sourced from (Clearly Cultural, 2024).

Each cultural dimension offers a valuable lens through which to examine social dynamics, with a significant note that they aren’t decisive factors. Although originally crafted to tackle organizational communication issues, these dimensions can shed light on how Mexican society is perceived. Let’s initiate our analysis with the power distance dimension, centring on the perception of inequalities in societies. In the Mexican context, with a score of 81, it is identified as a hierarchical society. This score signifies a social structure where individuals each have a distinctly defined place, and authority is generally accepted without significant questioning (Hofstede Insights, 2024).

While delving into the relationship between social hierarchy and the challenges associated with legislating and efficiently allocating resources, it becomes evident that the social hierarchy prevailing in Mexico, where authority is unquestionably accepted, may exert an influence on decision-making and policy implementation, especially within the realm of mental health. This observation is drawn from the paper titled *Comparative Analysis of the Legal Framework for Mental Health and Suicide in Mexico* (2021):

The absence of a federal framework that guides and provides directives to the states complicates the harmonization of legislation in line with WHO recommendations. This lack of unified guidance impacts crucial aspects such as service organization, human resources, user and family involvement, advocacy, human rights protection, equal access

to services, and financing. According to data from the IESM-WHO, only 2% of the budget allocated to health is directed to mental health in Mexico, with the majority of this percentage (80%) concentrated in psychiatric hospitals (Valdez-Santiago, Marín-Mendoza, & Marta Torres-Falcón, 2021, pp. 562-563).

Furthermore, the limited budgetary investment reflects the widespread acceptance of inequalities and the lack of priority given to mental health in the government agenda, possibly linked to the deep-seated social stigma in Mexican traditions. In the dimension of individualism, Mexico scores 34, signifying its identity as a collectivist society. This entails a heightened importance and allegiance to the group, whether it be family, friends, or the community.

In collectivist societies, transgressions result in shame and a loss of prestige, with success measured by how one stands out within the group or conforms to social norms (Hofstede Insights, 2024). Mexico, as a nation deeply rooted in traditional values and thinking, continues to place significance on belonging and acceptance within primary groups, particularly within the family unit. However, contemporary shifts in family structures, influenced by evolving gender roles, with women entering the workforce and consequently facing extended work hours and job pressures, instigate confusion. In some instances, households may experience fragmentation and isolation due to the limited time parents spend together:

The inability of family members to take on an emotionally close role that fosters trust and communication, and recognizes the emotional needs of others, can be attributed to belonging to traditional families. In these families, the development of emotional communication skills may be hindered as they prioritize maintaining strong family cohesion at the expense of individual expression of ideas and feelings (Morfín-López, 2018, p. 288).

In the masculinity and femininity dimension, assessing the distribution of gender roles and societal values, Mexico scores 69, portraying a society where “masculine” values such as competitiveness, ambition, and assertiveness take precedence. Despite increasing

awareness regarding the importance of gender equity and evolving gender roles, especially in more marginalized areas, the expectation to conform to traditional gender roles continues to endure (Hofstede Insights, 2024). As Morfin-López mentions, these gender roles generate domestic violence (2018):

The families of individuals with suicide attempts are families where violence is experienced daily. Parenting patterns in families with domestic violence are strongly differentiated for men and women, reinforcing societal expectations for each gender; aggressive men displaying strength and decisiveness, and women being expected to be docile, submissive, and obedient. These parenting characteristics and the bonds formed within the family, while subject to potential reconsideration by members over their lifetime, currently shape both the family dynamics and visible behaviours, subjective needs, and emotional expressions. When partners or parents perpetrate violence, the fear extends beyond just physical aggression; it encompasses the fear of relationship breakdown. This fear compels individuals to remain in destructive relationships due to a sense of security, a need for affection, and because they have witnessed and experienced it as something “normal” (Morfin-López, 2018, p. 286).

These roles perpetuate gender stereotypes. In Mexico, “the average suicide rate by gender, from 2017 to 2022, were 9.9 men per 100,000 and 2.1 women per 100,000. This gender difference has remained consistent” (INEGI, 2023, p. 2). This discrepancy indicates that in a society that disapproves of men showing emotional vulnerability and stigmatizes the expression of pain through crying, considering it a sign of weakness, it’s not surprising that the male gender experiences more suicide attempts and completed suicides. On the flip side, women encounter a higher incidence of physical-emotional violence, contributing to the risk of suicide. This phenomenon is further complicated by the shame they feel, making it difficult for them to openly discuss their experiences and prompting them to remain silent.

It’s also noteworthy to consider the LGBTI+ population in the country, “which comprises five million people (5.1% of the population aged 15 and over), with one in every 20 people identifying as part of this community. Regarding suicide risk, the LGBTI+ population faces a threefold higher percentage, reaching 26.1%. This data underscores that,

compared to the non-LGBTI+ population, the LGBTI+ community presents a 10-percentage point higher risk of suicide attempts” (INEGI, 2022, pp. 1-13).

In the dimension of avoidance of uncertainty, we explore how societies manage anxiety about the future and respond to changes. With a score of 82, Mexico is characterized as a country that prefers to avoid uncertainty through rigid codes of beliefs and behaviours, displaying intolerance towards unconventional conduct and ideas (Hofstede Insights, 2024). This approach could be related to various factors contributing to the increase in suicide rates. Discussing topics considered “taboo” becomes challenging due to associated stigmas, perceiving them as perplexing or difficult to comprehend, thus generating discomfort and unease in discussions.

Additionally, in this society, there is a strong emphasis on productivity and work, contributing to high levels of stress and anxiety—factors directly linked to mental health issues. “According to the independent research organization World Population Review, Mexico holds the highest annual average of working hours globally, reaching 2,148 hours. This excess of work, as detailed in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) report titled *Better Life Index*, can harm personal health, jeopardize safety, and increase stress (Cota, 2023, p. 1).

In the Long-Term Orientation dimension, Mexico scores 23, indicating a normative aspect of Mexican culture. In these societies, individuals exhibit a strong concern for establishing absolute truth and demonstrating normative thinking. There is a significant emphasis on respecting traditions, a relatively lower inclination to save for the future, and a focus on achieving quick results (Hofstede Insights, 2024). While these cultural values have historically shaped various aspects of Mexican society, changes in the current economic model have led to the presence of values that differ from the traditional ones, as emphasized by Morfín-López in her work on *Suicide Prevention, a Social Imperative* (2016):

Deep-seated aspects such as family unity, lifelong marriage, and gender relationships based on the patriarchal model have been impacted by new forms of interpersonal, group, and social interaction. In this context of high uncertainty, addressing traditional issues has become more complex. Until a few years ago, vertical authority and submission were prominent; however, these are also undergoing changes (2016, p. 4).

In the Indulgence dimension, which pertains to the extent of child socialization and how they regulate their desires and impulses based on upbringing, Mexican culture distinctly leans towards Indulgence, scoring 97. This inclination manifests in a positive outlook, a predisposition towards optimism, and a high appreciation for leisure time, freedom of action, and discretionary spending according to individual desires (Hofstede Insights, 2024). While indulgent cultures may be correlated with lower suicide rates, it's fundamental to highlight that they can also be associated with impulsive behaviours and an increased risk of substance abuse—factors prevalent in Mexican society when addressing suicide risk.

In this analysis of the cultural dimensions shaping Mexican society, we have delved into the pronounced social hierarchy marked by “power distance” the collectivist identity ingrained in Mexican culture, the persistence of traditional gender roles viewed through the “masculinity and femininity” lens, the aversion to uncertainty demonstrated in “avoidance of uncertainty”, the cultural normativity showcased in “long-term orientation”, and the evident indulgence reflected in a positive attitude towards leisure and freedom of action. These dimensions not only offer insights into Mexican society but also illuminate challenges in mental health, particularly concerning suicide risk.

Within this elaborate cultural landscape recognizing that comprehending suicide goes beyond simplifying it into a single variable; instead, it emerges from the intricate interplay of various factors. This nuanced understanding is vital for crafting effective interventions. It's crucial to acknowledge that these dimensions don't represent absolute truths but rather reflect prevailing tendencies. Moreover, recent years have seen significant transformations in Mexican society, driven by globalization and economic and cultural factors, notably showcased through the widespread influence of the internet.

However, we must go beyond cultural borders to fully understand the landscape. Migration, which has become a significant phenomenon in Mexican society, adds an additional layer to this complexity. In the United States alone, it is estimated that around 38.5 million residents are of Mexican origin (Consejo Nacional de Población , 2018). The paper *Immigration and Suicidal Behavior Among Mexicans and Mexican American* highlights the following findings:

Compared to Mexicans with no personal history of migration and no family members in the United States, those with immediate family members in the United States, Mexican-born immigrants who arrived prior to age 13, and US-born Mexican Americans face a higher risk of suicidal ideation. Firstly, studies in the United States indicate that US-born Mexican Americans have a significantly higher susceptibility to psychiatric disorders compared to their Mexican-born counterparts. Given that psychiatric disorders are associated with an increased risk of suicidality, we anticipate a parallel rise in suicidality linked to US birth among Mexican Americans residing in the United States. Secondly, there is evidence indicating that return migrants and family members of migrants in the Mexican population are more inclined to engage in the use of alcohol and illicit drugs, along with a higher prevalence of substance abuse or dependence disorders. As substance use and related disorders are recognized risk factors for suicidality, migration may be correlated with an augmented risk of suicidality within the broader Mexican population. Thirdly, social stressors associated with migration, both for migrants themselves and the families they leave behind, may contribute to an increased risk of suicidality. Migrants in the United States encounter various stressors linked to acculturation, encompassing social isolation and discrimination. In a study involving women in Mexico whose husbands were working in the United States, these women reported substantial stressors related to the loss of support, adapting to new obligations, and the potential for family disintegration (Borges, et al., 2009, pp. 728,731).

In summary, grasping the phenomenon of suicide in Mexico necessitates a comprehensive approach that encompasses the myriad social, economic, cultural, and migratory factors influencing it. Delving into these diverse factors underscores the pressing need to tackle suicide with thoroughness and compassion. Suicide prevention demands nuanced strategies attuned to these realities, alongside a concerted effort to dismantle the stigmas surrounding mental health and foster open, empathetic dialogue within society. In this regard, the role of the media is indispensable. They bear the responsibility of portraying social realities through conscientious narratives—be they fictional or real—steering clear of the infamous “Werther effect” and addressing the issue in a manner that challenges entrenched stigmas, fostering open, constructive discourse.

## **Suicide in Mexican Media**

Mexico is a country deeply rooted in the theme of death, a connection that back to pre-Hispanic times, where ancient Mesoamerican civilizations practised various rituals and held specific beliefs about this phenomenon. For them, death was seen as a transition to another plane of existence. With the arrival of the Spaniards and the introduction of Catholicism, many of these practices merged to give rise to what we now know as the tradition of the Day of the Dead, an annual celebration where it is believed that our deceased loved ones return to celebrate life and death. (Gómez-Pérez & Delgado-Solís, 2000).

This celebration has given rise to other cultural manifestations related to death, each with its own form of representation. However, despite the prominence of this phenomenon in our culture, it is met with deep respect and, in some cases, even a certain fear. This attitude towards death, partly influenced by our religious heritage, has contributed to the persistence of stigmas surrounding the topic of suicide, which can be reflected in the media and in society at large, either through silence or stigmatizing narratives.

Because of this and based on previous knowledge about the representation of suicide in classical stories and its perception in Mexican society, it is pertinent to explore how this topic is addressed in the country's media. A variety of media and representative samples of different Mexican media products have been selected, including soap operas, anthology series, movies, songs, and news from various digital media outlets from different periods. The goal is to understand how the topic of suicide or suicide attempts is approached in each medium, identify differences and common patterns, and examine the influence of these representations on the social perception of suicide. To analyse the narrative, we focus on various aspects: the psychological and demographic traits of the character, the method used (whether it was implicit or explicit), the causes of the attempt or completed suicide, the purpose within the plot, and the reception by the audience to measure its impact.

## Soap Operas

I will commence the analysis by focusing on television products, as series and soap operas play a central role as mirrors and shapers of popular culture. Among the main players in the production of this type of content stands out *Televisa*, a company that for many years was considered a monopoly due to concessions granted by the government. Although there are now other companies, *Televisa* still controls most of the media and telecommunication systems. Its influence on Spanish-language content extends throughout Latin America, making it unavoidable to see its content in Mexico (Estavillo, 2020; Enriquez, Madrazo, & Robles-Estrada, 2015, p. 373).

In addition, in the past, there was a model of exclusivity for popular artists or singers of the time, which has lost relevance with the advent of social media as it is not convenient for the artists. This model involved artists earning an extra bonus each month for acting, hosting, giving interviews, or making exclusive appearances at the TV network's events, motivating people to closely follow their productions due to the participation of recognized artists.

It is relevant to highlight how television works in the Mexican context. Given the high costs of cable television, most of the population was limited to open television channels, with *Televisa*, channel 10, being one of the most important and with the highest audience. Although this dynamic has been changing with the accessibility of the internet, and because *Televisa* is also now in the pay-TV market, soap operas have left an indelible mark on entire generations. These productions used to occupy specific time slots during the day, with the main soap opera airing in prime time, at 9 p.m., a time when most people were at home and could enjoy the program. With a higher audience rating, these soap operas used to present much more mature content compared to other programs aimed at a more teenage audience. Moreover, it's imperative to contextualize the historical backdrop against which these telenovelas unfolded, as elucidated by Pérez-García and Leal-Larrarte (2017):

Initially, television involved creating or glorifying characters for the audience and nullifying or portraying negatively those who opposed the nation's progress. Behaviours

considered antisocial could not be shown according to the official content agenda. This contributed to the generation of detached representations of social reality, which formed a partial worldview. Among the ideal types promoted was the cultural construction of gender guided by models of behaviour, image, roles, and identities that women and men were expected to adhere to, all of which had to be in line with morality, good customs, and everything demanded by Mexican society's conservatism. Therefore, within their narratives, especially those that are older, a lot of systemic violence can be found (Pérez-García & Leal-Larrarte, 2017, p. 169).

Soap operas are renowned for their emotionally charged plots and narrative arcs tailored primarily to a female audience. However, these productions not only foster identification but also “actively contribute to the construction, reproduction, and perpetuation of stereotypes related to class, gender, race, and age, often reinforcing undesirable cultural traits and characteristics such as machismo or classism” (Raimondi, 2011, p. 4).

On the other hand, *Televisa* has been recognized for its ability to capture audience attention through narratives that, at times, have leaned towards melodramatic and sentimental themes. In this context and given that it is the company with the greatest reach in Mexican society, there arises the need to explore how it addresses such a complex and delicate issue as suicide in its productions. Analysing the representation of suicide in Mexican television series and soap operas not only provides insight into how this phenomenon is perceived in society but also sheds light on how the media contributes to the construction of discourses and stereotypes related to mental health and emotional well-being. Guillermo Orozco elaborates on this in his work *La telenovela en México: ¿De una expresión cultural a un simple producto para la mercadotecnia?* (2006):

With its own distinctive identity and stylistic stamp, the telenovela, as a format within the fiction genre, has also become one of the most impactful media products nationally and internationally circulated. Rooted in a cultural matrix from which its narrative strength emanates, the telenovela can emotionally and cognitively engage its audiences, providing a space where key aspects of identity and social experience are reflected and negotiated... In the context of struggles and suffering caused by unemployment, violence, poverty, and social exclusion, television fiction becomes one of the few places

where our precarious and besieged identities dream, gaze, seek refuge, become emotionally involved, and are shared (Orozco-Gómez, 2006, pp. 12,15).

Although there are soap operas of various genres, melodrama stands out as the most employed, offering an exaggerated representation of everyday life, framed within specific time and space, and centred around basic feelings of fear, excitement, compassion, and laughter. As the drama concludes, conflicts are resolved, and secrets are revealed, allowing for the discovery of the true nature of each character's feelings.

Building upon the previously discussed points, a distinct gender hierarchy is evident within the narrative framework commonly observed in soap operas. In the classic "rags to riches" storyline, the protagonist undergoes a transformation characterized by adversity and challenges that serve to test her character and morality. Amidst these conflicts, the protagonist strives for redemption and fulfilment, while the antagonist, embodying malevolence, propels the tragic narrative towards a calamitous conclusion. This juxtaposition emphasizes the significance of virtue and morality, offering viewers a reassuring narrative structure.

In addition to the primary storyline, soap operas often interweave subplots for secondary characters, enriching the central narrative and offering diversity in storytelling. These subplots may delve into themes such as love, betrayal, friendship, or the pursuit of justice, adding layers of intricacy and profundity to the overarching tale.

In terms of narrative devices, music assumes an important role in shaping the emotional ambiance of scenes. Modulations in tone and rhythm synchronize with pivotal moments in the plot, heightening tension, and suspense, while accentuating the inner conflicts of characters. This musical accompaniment serves as an emotional catalyst, guiding audiences through the tumultuous array of feelings emblematic of melodrama.

Conversely, tight close-up shots are employed to capture the depth and complexity of human emotions. By zooming in on characters' facial expressions, these shots afford viewers insight into the subtle nuances of emotion, ranging from anguish and despair to joy and affection. This visual intimacy fosters a deeper connection between audience and characters, enabling a more direct and visceral experience of emotions. Such shots constitute an indispensable resource, particularly in productions tailored for Mexican television, where

exaggerated performances and expressions abound, intensifying the emotional resonance conveyed to viewers.

The soap opera *Cuna de Lobos*, produced by Carlos Téllez, remains to this day as *Televisa*'s most iconic success. During its initial run from 1986 to 1987, it garnered an impressive average of 53 daily rating points, peaking at 73 in its final episode. This enduring cultural phenomenon has left an indelible mark on the memories of multiple generations. During its inception, the soap opera held an unconventional time slot, airing at 6:30 p.m. Initially, it was regarded as an unconventional venture by *Televisa* executives, who doubted its potential due to its departure from traditional melodramatic norms. The storyline, focusing on the antagonist rather than the protagonists, coupled with the use of short sequences, provided a sense of dynamic pacing compared to other contemporary productions. Ultimately, it exceeded expectations to the extent that it secured a prime-time slot. (Díaz-Moreno, 2011). The storyline centres on Catalina Creel, an ambitious and ruthless woman whose sole affection lies in money and her son, Alejandro. Catalina manipulates and commits crimes to ensure her son's future, setting off a chain of events that culminate in tragedy. While initially, some characters harbour fondness for Catalina, as she becomes entangled in ever more atrocious acts, she transforms into a figure both loathed and feared.

The sociocultural context of Mexico at that time, characterized by an economic recession, the implementation of new neoliberal policies increasing social inequality<sup>14</sup>, and the devastating impact of the 1985 earthquake, likely contributed to the acceptance of the character of Catalina Creel. Her portrayal as a manipulative and corrupt woman over 50 resonated with the audience during a period of uncertainty and social unrest. During this time, the airing of *Cuna de Lobos* paralyzed the country, and the phenomenon of Catalina extended beyond the screen, being referred to as an icon of villainy in Mexican culture. The importance of appearances and social status in Mexican society, aspects deeply rooted since colonial times and still present today, were reflected through the character of Catalina, with her actions and her ability to manipulate others, along with her strategy of using disguises to commit her crimes. Throughout the plot, Catalina commits a series of crimes and manipulations to secure the future of her son Alejandro and maintain her position of power.

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<sup>14</sup> To learn more, it is suggested to read: Salazar, 2004.

However, her actions ultimately lead to her being discovered and facing the loss of her son, her reputation, and her freedom.

In the final scene, Catalina, cornered by the police due to her actions, receives a phone call informing her of her son's tragic fate, who fell into the trap she herself had prepared for her stepson. Stripped of everything she once possessed and pained by loss, she makes a definitive decision: she pours the poison she used to kill her victims into the juice, revealing the method she will use to end her own life. The following shot shows her lifeless body on the bed, dressed in the same attire she used when committing her crimes, as the police enter the room. With this scene, Catalina confirms her identity, but also refers to herself as the ultimate victim of her own actions, and that until the end, she had control over her destiny. This moment marks the dramatic conclusion of the character's narrative arc. Even as Catalina maintained a tight grip on her destiny until the bitter end, the climax of her story reveals a stark truth: her fatal downfall was driven by her overbearing ego and persistent belief in her invincibility. Rooted in arrogance and a profound lack of empathy, this fatal flaw ultimately steered her towards her tragic demise.

The ambiguity of her death, along with elements left in the plot, ignited speculation among the audience as to whether Catalina had faked her own death. This uncertainty contributed to the character's legacy as one of the most memorable in Mexican television history, keeping alive the discussion of her fate even after the end of the soap opera. Unfortunately, there are no records from the time indicating whether the character's outcome triggered a wave of copycat suicides, but Catalina Creel's death certainly left an indelible mark on the viewers' memory and contributed to the character's legacy as one of the most memorable and fascinating in the history of Mexican television.



Figure 3. Death of Catalina Creel, *Cuna de Lobos*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 1986)

*La mentira*, produced by *Televisa* in 1998, is a successful adaptation of the original work of the same name created by Caridad Bravo Adams in 1965. Despite the multiple versions over the years, the 1998 version remains one of the most popular to date. The success of this version is partly due to its stellar cast and the prominence of the protagonist, one of the most outstanding actresses of that time. Additionally, soap operas continued to be an attractive product for the audience, as they addressed plots of love, revenge, and deceit, feelings with which many viewers could identify. The story primarily unfolds in Mexico City and on a ranch, highlighting gender stereotypes, with the dominant male figure on the ranch and the woman in a more submissive role. However, part of the protagonist's appeal lies in her strong character, which challenges some of these conservative roles.

The plot focuses on Demetrio, who seeks to avenge the death of his brother, Ricardo, who committed suicide after being emotionally manipulated by a woman. This woman, after toying with Ricardo's feelings, cruelly rejects him, leading him to despair and ultimately make the tragic decision to take his own life. Driven by pain and anger, Demetrio decides to find this woman, make her fall in love with him, marry her, and then make her pay for the suffering she caused his brother. Ricardo's suicide serves as the starting point to unleash the entire plot. Ricardo is portrayed as a young man in love with the countryside and hardworking, who has managed to make his ranch prosper. His greatest wish is to marry the woman he loves, but his dream fades when he receives a humiliating letter from her. This

letter, revealing that she never felt like a woman beside him and that she aborted the baby they were expecting, plunges him into despair.

The scene unfolds as an initially emotion-filled sequence, as Ricardo receives the letter from his beloved. However, as he progresses through the reading, he plunges into an abyss of anguish. For several minutes, we witness the emotional deterioration of the character, who experiences a roller coaster of emotions: from initial hope to sadness, pain, anger, and finally despair. This meticulous treatment of emotions aims to evoke empathy for the poor lovelorn man. And hatred towards who will be the villain of the story, who is simultaneously shown with her lover, planning her future with a wealthy man. This contrast between Ricardo's vulnerability and the cruelty of the woman and her lover underscores the tragedy of the situation.

The gradual transition of light, fading from twilight to complete darkness, serves as a poignant reflection of Ricardo's emotional descent. This visual motif vividly depicts the gradual loss of hope, succumbing to the overwhelming darkness of despair. Moreover, Ricardo's profound anguish and confusion lead him to ignite everything around him, sparing only the letter containing the catalyst of his suffering—an act that marks the inception of the revenge narrative. Ultimately, consumed by alcohol and torment, he chooses to end his life. In essence, this scene is meticulously crafted to convey the emotional intricacies of the character and lay the groundwork for the plot, utilizing a blend of visual and narrative elements to leave a lasting impact on the audience.

The phenomenon of love-induced suicide has been portrayed across history in works from various countries. In Mexico, this theme is deeply ingrained in the culture, particularly due to prevailing machismo. In this context, men may feel not only the loss of their beloved but also a blow to their own masculinity, leading to feelings of humiliation. Moreover, the method commonly used for such acts has been consistently the same, deemed infallible and lethal among Mexican men. While concrete data on imitative suicides are lacking, this figure has been depicted in diverse ways over time. Additionally, it's noteworthy that such television productions typically attract a predominantly female audience, making it challenging for women to fully relate to the character.



Figure 4. Ricardo's suicide, *La mentira*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 1998),

*La madrastra*, the *Televisa* star of 2005, broadcasted in prime time, whose success transcended borders thanks to its excellent international acceptance. Backed by an outstanding cast, considered the best of the production company at that time, with a story full of mystery and a producer with a successful track record, which also featured a distinctive song, *Viveme* by Laura Pausini. All these credentials served it to become one of the 5 most successful soap operas of all time. ( Televisa, 2018)

The plot of *La madrastra* revolves around María Fernández Acuña de San Román, a woman who, after spending 20 years in prison for a crime she did not commit, seeks to clear her name and regain custody of her children. However, she confronts the harsh reality that her ex-husband, Esteban, has misled their children into believing their mother is deceased. In a pact with Esteban, who now regrets his past deeds, María reluctantly agrees to become the stepmother of her own children, who resent and treat her with disdain.

The character I will analyse for her development is Alba, one of Esteban's aunts, who has harbored a deep-seated hatred for María for a long time. Upon witnessing María's return as the stepmother, her animosity and resentment escalate as she observes María assuming the role she once held in Esteban's life, whom she harboured secret feelings for despite him being her nephew. Coming to terms with the impossibility of her desires, Alba resolves to seek revenge by kidnapping two of María's children.

Alba is portrayed as an old, evil, and cruel woman, obsessed with being the mistress of the house and with her love for Esteban. From the beginning, it is impossible to feel empathy towards this character. Her final scene occurs when, cornered by the police due to the kidnapping, Alba, knowing she is lost and in an act of desperation upon accepting that she can never obtain Esteban's love, climbs onto the roof of the mansion. The scene reflects literally how she has no escape, so she decides to free herself and confesses her feelings out loud before jumping from the roof. This outcome reflects how, trapped in her own web of lies and envy, Alba chooses death upon realizing she is devoid of hope to attain the forbidden love she longed for, thus freeing herself from both objects that were of value to her.

This archetype of villain opts for death when feeling overwhelmed by their actions, thus evading the consequences, allowing the main characters to break free from the malevolence that plagued them and bringing a tragic conclusion to their storyline. While reminiscent of Catalina Creel's fate, the distinction lies in Alba's lack of significance in the narrative and her lower popularity, rendering her a rather forgettable antagonist.



Figure 5. Alba's leap from the roof, *La Madrastra*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2005).

*Lo que la vida me robó* was the third remake of the successful novel *Bodas de odio* by Caridad Bravo Adams and represented *Televisa's* strong bet in 2013 by occupying prime time. The soap opera achieved an impressive average rating of 27 points and an average share of 49 points during its broadcast, meaning that almost half of the televisions turned on at that

time were tuned in to this thrilling story. With 196 episodes, it exceeded the typical duration of standard soap operas in Mexico (Aja, 2014). This remake stood out for being the first adaptation set in modern times while retaining the premise and basic elements of the original plot. The story follows the “beauty and the beast” formula, with a woman coerced by her mother into marrying a man she despises, only to eventually fall in love with him. The chemistry between the protagonists, who were a real-life couple, added authenticity to the relationship and deepened the audience’s connection to the story.

The character under analysis, Fabiola, is initially introduced as the cousin of the protagonist. Her antagonism stems from the belief that she is the rightful heir to the family fortune, fuelled by doubts about the paternity of her illegitimate cousin. However, as the plot unfolds, her true origin is revealed as the abandoned daughter of the central villain, Graciela, who is also the mother of the protagonist. Fabiola grew up without the love or attention of her biological mother, spending most of her life in boarding schools. Initially portrayed as a money-driven antagonist, her character arc leads her to desperately seek her mother’s affection. However, Graciela manipulates her for her own gain, exploiting Fabiola’s longing for acceptance and using her to secure a share of the inheritance. Eventually, feeling betrayed and abandoned by Graciela, Fabiola reaches her breaking point and confronts the harsh reality that she will never be truly accepted or loved by her mother.

In Fabiola’s final scenes, we encounter a woman broken and consumed by hatred. Upon her release from prison, she discovers her mother’s presence in the city and decides to confront her, wielding a gun. As she faces her mother, Fabiola points the gun at her, revealing her knowledge of the truth. Despite Graciela’s repentance and plea for forgiveness, Fabiola, overwhelmed by emotion, cannot bring herself to believe her, fully aware of her mother’s history of manipulation. In contrast to harbouring a deep-seated desire for redemption through her mother’s words, Fabiola ultimately realizes its impossibility. In a moment of agonizing conflict, she expresses gratitude for giving her life while tragically ending it, pulling the trigger in front of her mother.

This poignant portrayal of gratitude intertwined with self-destruction serves as retribution against Graciela. Her selfish and ruthless actions pushed her daughter to the brink of despair, leaving behind a burden of guilt that lingers until the story’s conclusion. Her tragic

story aligns perfectly with the title of the soap opera, as what life robbed her of was the opportunity to have a true home and feel she belonged to someone. Born into a ruthless and lonely environment, she dies feeling equally desolate. This can be seen as an example of egoistic suicide<sup>15</sup> as described by Durkheim; Fabiola experienced a childhood marked by the absence of love and attention, growing up in boarding schools, suggesting a significant lack of family connection and emotional bonds. Additionally, her desperate quest for her mother's affection and her extreme reaction to her betrayal suggest profound emotional alienation. Fabiola's final confrontation with her mother and her decision to take her own life in front of her can be interpreted as an act of despair stemming from her lack of social and emotional integration. Although the action can also be seen as an attempt to punish her mother for her selfish and manipulative actions, her ultimate decision to commit suicide reflects a deep sense of despair and lack of hope in the possibility of finding redemption or belonging.

Among all the suicide scenes we have analysed, this one stands out for its character development. Stripped of everything throughout the story, including her family, identity, wealth, and motivations, Fabiola ends up plunged into profound sadness and hopelessness, seeking, in the end, perhaps vengeance or perhaps just driven by overwhelming emotions. Additionally, it is important to mention that according to figures from INEGI, gunshot is the least used method by women, while it is the second most common among men (INEGI, 2023).

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<sup>15</sup> Note page 52.



Figure 6. Fabiola shoots herself, *Lo que la vida me robó*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2013).

In the same period when *Lo que la vida me robó* was aired, a new proposal emerged in the 6:30 p.m. time slot, laden with fresh yet deeply rooted stories. Typically, these time slots feature lighter content, but this production, led by Roberto Gómez Fernández, offered a unique and original storyline. It's worth noting that, during this year, violence in Mexico was on the rise due to the ongoing war against drug trafficking<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, *El color de la pasión*, in contrast with other soap operas, presented more explicit and violence-laden scenes, reflecting the audience's increasing exposure to this type of content. While previous scenes we've analysed merely hinted at firearm use or depicted splattering blood, this soap opera, true to its title, was replete with murders and suicides, turning the colour of passion into the colour of blood.

*El color de la pasión*, produced by Televisa in 2014, offered a plot full of intense emotions, family intrigues, and unrestrained passions. Set in an environment teeming with secrets and manipulations, the story follows the intertwined fate of Lucía Gaxiola and Marcelo Escalante, two young individuals caught in a whirlwind of love and revenge. Lucía, a passionate and innocent young woman, experiences a heartbreaking betrayal on her wedding day when she discovers her fiancé's infidelity with her own sister, Nora, who reveals herself as one of the main villains. On the other hand, Marcelo arrives in the city of Puebla from the capital with the purpose of avenging his brother's death, who committed

<sup>16</sup> To learn more, it is suggested to read: Gutiérrez Cuellar, Magdaleno del Río, & Yáñez Rivas, 2010.

suicide after being scorned by a woman. This woman turns out to be Lucía's aunt and stepmother, as well as Nora's mother, creating an intricate web of family relationships and rivalries.

The initial narrative arc to delve into centres around Federico's storyline. Much like Ricardo's role in *La mentira*, Federico's tragic decision to take his own life sets off a chain reaction of events that deeply affect the central characters and shape the trajectory of the plot. His desperate act serves a distinct purpose: to incite fury and a thirst for vengeance in his brother, the story's protagonist, while also unveiling another hidden truth connected to Rebeca, who is Lucía's aunt and stepmother. Federico, a young man between 25 and 30 years old, is in a relationship with an older, married woman, who turns out to be Rebeca. During a heated argument with the latter, who decides to end the relationship due to Federico's excessive infatuation and youth, he reacts explosively, pulls out a gun, and shoots himself in front of Rebeca, leaving a devastating impact on the plot and the involved.



Figure 7. Federico decides to shoot himself in front of Rebeca, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014)



Figure 8. Federico dead on the floor covered in blood, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).

Federico's suicide is crafted to emotionally impact the audience and underscore Rebeca's selfish and manipulative nature. While she indirectly contributes to his death by engaging in a forbidden relationship and toying with his feelings, she never displays signs of remorse for her actions. Rebeca's lack of empathy and accountability further fuels the audience's aversion towards her, establishing a conflict-driven dynamic that propels the story forward. However, it's important to note that Federico's character psychology isn't deeply explored beyond some mentions of his sensitivity and emotional instability by his brother and mother. Although it's stated that Federico was emotionally unstable, the plot doesn't delve into the reasons behind his suffering or adequately address the complexities of his mental state. Nevertheless, his suicide sets the stage for the story's unfolding.

Nora's narrative arc is one of the most complex and dark in the soap opera. From the onset, she is depicted as a child manipulated by her mother, Rebeca, filled with envy and resentment towards her sister Lucía. The constant rivalry between the two sisters, fuelled by Rebeca's manipulation, pushes Nora into a state of constant dissatisfaction and attention-seeking behaviour. As the plot progresses, Nora encounters a series of situations that drive her towards despair. Although initially she manages to "steal her sister's life" by becoming pregnant by Lucía's ex-boyfriend, her happiness is overshadowed when she discovers that her sister is happily dating Marcelo. This discovery intensifies Nora's obsession and deepens

her sense of failure and emotional emptiness as she compares herself to her sister's apparent happiness.

The unwanted pregnancy and the prospect of marrying Lucía's ex-boyfriend become a turning point for Nora. Desperate to escape her suffering and find an outlet for her emotional problems, she decides to attempt suicide by cutting her wrists, marking her first suicide attempt. This desperate act reflects the anguish and desperation consuming Nora, who feels trapped in a cycle of pain and self-destruction. The chosen method for the first suicide attempt, wrist-cutting, is not only visually impactful but also symbolizes Nora's slow and painful process of self-destruction. The fact that her mother finds her in that state adds another layer of emotional complexity to the scene, showcasing the complicated and contradictory dynamics of their relationship. Although Rebeca finds her and shows concern for her, Nora's presence in that situation also reflects the deep loneliness and hopelessness she feels, even in her mother's presence.



Figure 9. Nora's suicide attempt by cutting her veins, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).

Throughout the narrative, suicide attempts become a recurring motif in Nora's life. She employs them to manipulate her family and pursue her own agenda. For instance, upon discovering Marcelo and Lucía's impending wedding, and subsequently facing rejection from Marcelo, Nora makes a second suicide attempt by throwing herself in front of a car,

revealing both her emotional turmoil and her inability to cope with rejection. Additionally, it underscores her stubbornness in the face of disappointment.



Figure 10. Nora tries to commit suicide by throwing herself in front of a car to manipulate Marcelo, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).

It is important to highlight that while Nora begins attending sessions with a psychologist during the plot, this intervention does not delve into the complexities of her mental health. Instead, it becomes another resource to continue her manipulations and emotional blackmail, showing a lack of true addressing of her psychological issues in the story.

Nora's situation worsens dramatically when she discovers the true nature of her mother, who turns out to be a murderer and adulteress. This revelation shakes the foundations of her world, leaving her disoriented and desperate. The loss of her faith in her mother, combined with the revelation that her biological father is not who she believed, leads Nora into a downward spiral of despair and hopelessness with no return. As Nora grapples with the truth of her origins and faces the reality that her biological father is not who she believed him to be, the once idyllic image she cherished of her family shatters irreparably. She is left bereft of the two pillars upon which she had relied so heavily. This revelation deepens her sense of abandonment and lovelessness, fuelling her resentment towards her mother and creating an emotional abyss that appears insurmountable.

The scene portraying Nora's tragic decision to end her life is imbued with profound symbolism and intense emotional weight. Regardless her mother's frantic efforts to intervene and express love, Nora's final words echo with palpable hatred before she takes her irreversible step. This decisive move not only signifies the culmination of the tumultuous conflict between mother and daughter but also serves as a poignant form of retribution for Rebeca, who, despite her flaws, harboured a deep love for Nora.

Nora's deliberate choice to throw herself down the very staircase where her mother's actions led to Lucia's mother's demise adds an additional layer of profound significance to the scene. It symbolizes the closure of a vicious cycle of malevolence and manipulation, which originated from a similar tragic event. Moreover, the striking contrast between Lucia's pristine white attire and Nora's sombre black garments starkly highlights the fundamental dichotomy between good and evil. Yet, the deliberate portrayal of the scene in slow-motion hints at Nora's eventual liberation from the anguish that had consumed her, finding a semblance of peace in death. Much like Fabiola in *Lo que la vida me robó*, Nora embodies the archetype of a daughter desperately yearning for her mother's love, willing to traverse any length to attain it. A very romanticized way of portraying a reality that many people may experience, albeit somewhat dramatized here. However, idealizing suicide as a response to feelings of being unloved by parents or abandoned can be very dangerous.



Figure 11. Nora decides to throw herself down the stairs, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).



Figure 12. Rebeca is with her dying daughter, while Nora, in her final moments, expresses her hatred towards her mother before passing away, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).

Rebeca, the main villain of the story, is portrayed as a selfish and envious woman, willing to commit murder to achieve her goals. Throughout the plot, Rebeca never displays genuine remorse for her actions, but rather her concern and anxiety mainly surface when she fears being caught in her misdeeds. However, the only thing that seems genuine in her is her love and concern for her daughter, Nora. Therefore, after Nora's suicide, she is left disoriented and hopeless, as depicted in the final scene where, while everyone is at the cemetery burying Nora, she is in Nora's room reliving shared moments with her, experiencing deep pain and melancholy, highlighted by sad background music.

However, this moment of nostalgia is interrupted when Rebeca goes in search of the gun with which Federico committed suicide. When Lucía arrives, Rebeca initially seems to aim the gun at her, blaming her for Nora's death for always being in Lucía's shadow, thus reflecting the same envy and resentment she had towards her own sister. But in the end, Rebeca points the gun at herself and ends her own life, dying in a similar manner to how her character was introduced.

This final act represents the punishment received by the villain, as in the end her ghost is seen condemned to wander eternally around the house, perpetuating the stereotype that suicide is a sin, and one receives punishment for it. Likewise, it is also implied that she chooses this ending because since her daughter killed herself in that house, her soul will be

with hers, so she can spend eternity with her daughter. This outcome is similar to the villain archetypes we have analysed in both *Cuna de lobos* and *La madrastra*, with the difference being that the element that drives Rebeca to suicide, in the end, is indeed a desolation for being left alone and the longing to spend eternity with her daughter.



Figure 13. Rebeca shoots herself, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).

Throughout the story, there is another suicide attempt by a secondary character, Nazario, which exemplifies how melodrama seeks to portray love and suffering intensely and dramatically. After returning home and discovering his murdered wife, Nazario plunges into deep grief and despair. In a moment of overwhelming desperation, Nazario finds a knife and contemplates the possibility of taking his own life to escape the unbearable pain he feels from the loss of his loved one. This scene, charged with emotion and drama, reflects the intensity of Nazario's love for his wife and the suffering he experiences upon losing her. Although this love was more mature and stronger, arising from the death of his spouse rather than betrayal, it still serves as an example of the archetype of desperate acts for love. However, in the end, it becomes clear that this act primarily served for dramatic effect, and furthermore, it underscores the importance of support and the presence of others in moments of emotional crisis, such as when Lucia's other aunt arrives and interrupts the moment.



Figure 14. Nazario tries to commit suicide when he sees his wife dead, *El color de la pasión*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2014).

## TV Series

Anthology series are a highly popular television format that offer different plots and characters in each episode, allowing for great flexibility in terms of stories, styles, and genres. Each episode tells a complete and independent story, meaning that viewers do not need to follow the series continuously to enjoy it.

One of the main advantages of anthology series is the creative autonomy that this format offers. Creators have the freedom to explore different genres, styles, and themes in each episode, enabling them to experiment and provide a variety of stories to their audience. Additionally, this adaptability allows them to address sensitive and contemporary issues, which can attract different types of viewers and maintain their interest over time. A distinctive feature of anthology series is their focus on a main plot and central character in each episode, allowing for greater development and depth, making it easier for viewers to emotionally connect with the characters.

Another significant advantage is the relatively low production investment. By using accessible sets and changing the cast in each episode, production costs are reduced compared to traditional series. Furthermore, by not requiring the maintenance of narrative coherence over multiple seasons, the financial risk for producers is lower. In Mexico, anthology series

have also served as a platform for new talent in the television industry. By utilizing emerging actors and directors, economic costs can be maintained while providing opportunities for new talents to gain experience and recognition in the industry.

The emergence of the television melodrama genre through anthology series coincided with a period of significant change in Mexico during the 1980s<sup>17</sup>. In this context, anthology series not only offered entertainment but also addressed relevant social issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, gender discrimination, and poverty. This focus on everyday life issues resonated with the audience and contributed to raising awareness about these issues in Mexican society.

This combination of factors made melodramatic anthology series an integral part of Mexican television culture since the 1980s, providing entertainment, reflection, and the opportunity to discover and nurture new talent in the industry. Among these series, *Mujer, casos de la vida real* emerged as a notable television phenomenon in Mexico. It served as a platform to recount real-life stories of individuals affected by the devastating earthquake of 1985, aiming to aid in the search for their missing loved ones (Medrano, 2023).

The series rapidly gained popularity, prompting its expansion to address a variety of other pressing social issues. It aired for 21 years until its final episode in 2007. The format featured Silvia Pinal, a renowned actress and presenter, who received letters from individuals sharing their personal experiences and challenges, which formed the basis for the episodes. *Mujer casos de la vida real* stood out among its contemporaries for its realism and its adeptness at tackling difficult and controversial topics directly and sincerely. Unlike other anthology series, it didn't always provide happy endings, which amplified its impact on the audience. In just 30 minutes, the series endeavoured to present deep and emotive stories based on real events, heightening viewers' emotions by exposing the harsh realities of the situations. Due to the brevity of the narrative, the series focused on portraying the issue through the central character, facilitating a deep immersion in the situation and a better understanding, thereby eliciting empathy or revulsion, depending on the case. The script allowed for an exploration of the character's psychology, fully comprehending their situation.

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<sup>17</sup> Suggested Reading: Sarro, 2018.

The stories presented were genuine and not sugar-coated; while they could contain doses of drama, this was due to the nature of the themes addressed, which often proved uncomfortable. There was always a search to portray everyday life authentically to generate a greater impact and identification, as well as to raise awareness about various social problems. This led to the support of some foundations that supported the cases presented. *Televisa* also allowed for a lot of flexibility, making it a program that, despite having strong scenes, could be aired during family-friendly hours.

The first of the episodes we will analyse from this series is called *Causa y Consecuencia*. The episode begins by showing Daniel in a moment of vulnerability and sadness, writing a suicide letter while intoxicated. The scene is filled with melancholy and pain, heightened by the background music, allowing the viewer to feel the anguish of the main character. The plot unfolds with the arrival of the police after hearing a gunshot, and the delivery of the letter to Daniel's mother, who discovers the reasons that led her son to suicide. The mother becomes the main antagonist, a strict and conservative woman who blames her son for her own unhappiness and has rejected him since childhood. This is due to considering him responsible for his father's abandonment as well as his sexual orientation, which leads her to abuse him constantly physically and verbally. Throughout the episode, Daniel's experiences at school are revealed, where he suffers bullying due to his sexual orientation, leading to the point of experiencing sexual abuse. The story unfolds through Daniel's letter, allowing the viewer to understand his feelings and suffering, as well as the character's mother.

The final scene, where the mother is shown crying regretfully over her son's dead body, deeply impacts the viewer. Despite the mother's cruel behaviour, her pain at the end of the episode creates a sense of discomfort and sadness among the audience. Daniel's final phrase, thanking his mother but expressing that he will be better off in a place where he will not receive cruelty or beatings, reflects the harsh reality of many LGBTI individuals in a conservative and macho environment like that of Mexico. It is also worth mentioning that neither the body nor the suicide itself is shown. Only Daniel is seen writing the letter, a resource used to tell the story, and then the neighbour is responsible for reporting that she

heard a gunshot, implying what happened. In this episode, the explicit scenes are those that show the violence Daniel was experiencing.



Figure 15. Daniel is writing his suicide letter while crying inconsolably, *Mujer casos de la vida real*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2004)

The episode *Remordimiento* unveils a shocking plot centred around the rivalry between cousins, culminating in a tragic act of suicide. The story unfolds with the death of Lorena's mother during childbirth, leading her aunt to take on the role of caregiver. From that moment, Lorena nurtures feelings of jealousy and resentment towards her cousin Alejandra, whom she perceives as an intruder, stealing her mother's attention and affection. For years, Lorena psychologically abuses Alejandra, exacerbating her sense of rivalry and disdain towards her. As time passes, the situation becomes increasingly unbearable for Alejandra, who is affected by her cousin's constant harassment and scorn. The climax comes when Alejandra makes the desperate decision to take her own life, cutting her wrists in the bathroom. The scene is visually disturbing and poignant, showing an approximately 11-year-old girl submerged in a bathtub filled with blood, with the word *perdóñenme* ("forgive me") written on the mirror in blood. This graphic representation of suicide conveys the guilt and suffering that led Alejandra to make that decision.

Additionally, the episode addresses the emotional repercussions of suicide on Lorena, leaving her filled with remorse that will accompany her for the rest of her life. This exploration of the consequences of bullying and rivalry among relatives adds a level of

emotional complexity to the episode. The impact of *Remordimiento* is such that its complete airing has become difficult to find and scenes regarding suicide have been censored, underscoring the intensity and seriousness of the theme addressed in this episode.



Figure 16. Alejandra is found dead in the bathtub, *Mujer casos de la vida real*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2005)

The story of Daniel in the episode *El Gordo* of *Mujer, casos de la vida real* portrays the harsh reality of a 12-year-old boy who suffers from bullying due to his overweight. Daniel faces harassment not only from his schoolmates but also from his physical education teacher, who exacerbates his school situation even further. Daniel's family situation is also complicated, as his parents are amidst a deteriorating marriage. His constantly grumpy father takes it out on him, making him feel ashamed of his weight. Meanwhile, his mother, although kind, is absent at home due to her relationship with a new boyfriend and plans to leave home, leaving Daniel with his father. The only bright spot in Daniel's life is a schoolmate who treats him kindly and becomes his friend. Daniel begins to develop feelings for her, but his hope fades when he discovers that she is dating his main aggressor.

This disappointment triggers an emotional crisis in Daniel, who seeks refuge in food to deal with anxiety. In an impulsive act, he eats all his classmates' food at school, leading his father to be called in, who reacts with anger and shame, punishing him and taking away junk food while locking him in his room. The combination of bullying pressure, the heartbreaking family situation, and the rejection from his friend lead him to an irreparable

emotional crisis. The final scene shows Daniel locked in his room, feeling completely alone and desperate, without the recourse he always turns to when he feels this way, so he decides to cut his wrists to escape the pain and anguish he feels.



Figure 17. Daniel decides to cut his wrists due to the emotional crisis, *Mujer casos de la vida real*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2005).

The episode *Mochila mortal* tells the story of Estefani, a teenager trapped in a dysfunctional family environment marked by poverty. In her home, her father's alcoholism and her mother's emotional exhaustion create an atmosphere of psychological abuse from which Estefani feels unable to escape. Additionally, at school, she suffers bullying due to her economic situation, which exacerbates her feelings of loneliness and desperation. In a desperate bid to alter her circumstances, Estefani chooses to engage in drug trafficking, hoping for a swift and effortless path to financial gain. However, this choice backfires when she loses all the drugs she was carrying in her backpack, plunging her into a precarious situation with no one to turn to for help or support. As she grapples with overwhelming despair, Estefani contemplates suicide as her sole escape route.

As she prepares to end her life, Estefani begins to pray, evidence of her fear and regret in the face of her impending action. To her, suicide seems like the only viable way out, as she perceives her fate as inevitable and lacks any emotional connection that could save her. Thus, she makes the decision to take her own life by hanging herself in her room, after witnessing her drunken father and failing in her attempt to communicate with him, which

intensifies the viewer's sense of helplessness. At the end of the episode, we see Estefani's family at the police station, being interrogated and denying the fact that their daughter could take her own life. The scene reflects the pain and guilt of the family, who regrets not being there for her when she needed them most, especially her father, who was always in an inappropriate.

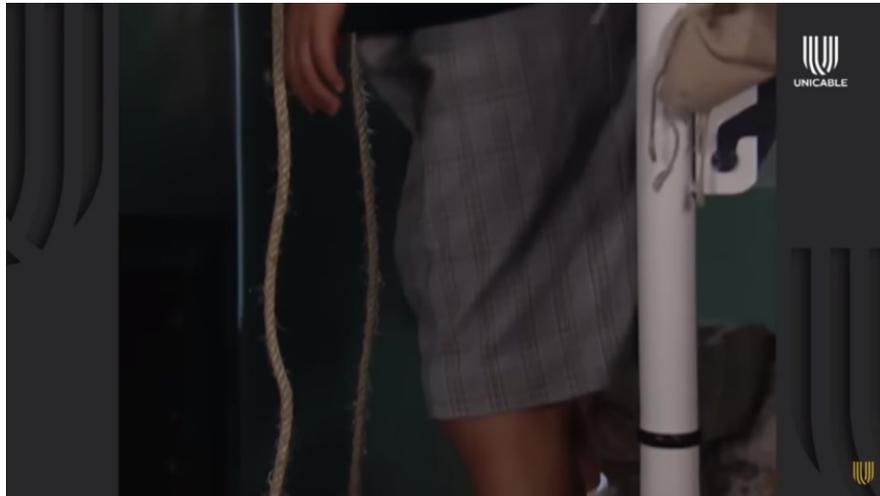


Figure 18. Estefani hangs herself in her room, *Mujer casos de la vida real*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 1985).

In *La única salida* we encounter Jorge, a teenager raised by a single mother who tirelessly fought to provide for him after his father abandoned them upon learning of her pregnancy. Jorge feels misunderstood due to his mother's relentless drive to propel him forward. This pressure, coupled with relentless bullying at school, leaves him feeling increasingly abandoned. When his mother decides to transfer him to an all-boys religious school, hoping for a fresh start, things only deteriorate for Jorge. He remains a target for violence and harassment, amplifying his sense of isolation and despair.

In a final attempt to find help, Jorge tries to follow his mother's advice after being brutally beaten by his classmates and decides to approach the school principal, who was a priest. However, what he encounters is an even worse abuse, further exacerbating his suffering. Jorge decides to take his own life by hanging himself, also in his room, leaving a farewell letter to his mother revealing the deep emotional pain generated by the sense of rejection he has felt throughout his entire life, even from his own father. This sense of

helplessness and rejection leads him to the decision to end his life, reflecting in his message the belief that death is the only way to escape the constant disapproval and suffering he has experienced. Although Jorge suffered bullying for being perceived as effeminate, his sexual orientation is not further explored.



Figure 19. Jorge hangs himself in his room and his mother finds him, *Mujer casos de la vida real*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 1993).

The plot of *La edad del dolor* introduces us to Sergio, a teenager who has been the victim of physical and verbal violence by his mother throughout his life. This woman, facing the upbringing of her two children without the presence of a partner, projects her contempt and disdain for men onto Sergio. On one occasion, she leaves Sergio home alone while she takes his sister to the hospital. It is then that Sergio's neighbour Adela, who is also abused by her mother, is sent to collect a debt from Sergio's mother, despite feeling uncomfortable about Sergio's previous harassment. Regardless her doubts, Adela fulfils the task imposed by her mother and ends up visiting Sergio at his home. Taking advantage of her loneliness, Sergio abuses her, resulting in an unwanted pregnancy for Adela.

Deeply depressed and unable to trust anyone about what had happened, Adela took her brother's gun and decided to shoot herself in the womb while in her room, choosing to die rather than give life to her rapist's child. This tragic story was told to the programme by Sergio, who faced the harsh consequences of his actions. Before taking her own life, Adela reveals the identity of her rapist to her brother, which triggers an inadvertent act of revenge

on Sergio's part. In a shocking twist, during the incident, Sergio's younger sister is killed while trying to protect her brother. This event highlights the stark reality of an environment marked by violence, where the cycle of abuse seems to perpetuate itself endlessly. However, it is important to recognise that Adela also lived in solitude, to the extent that suicide became her only way out of the trauma she experienced.



Figure 20. Adela shoots herself because she's pregnant, *Mujer casos de la vida real*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 1985).

*Lo que callamos las mujeres* is another melodramatic anthology series produced by TV Azteca<sup>18</sup> in response to the success of *Mujer, casos de la vida real*, which aired on its rival network *Televisa* in the year 2000. Following a similar format, this series presents stories based on real events, specifically focusing on issues that primarily affect women and are told from their perspective. With hour-long episodes and still in production, the series has managed to adapt to technological advances, offering viewers the possibility of accessing episodes online through the official TV Azteca website (TvAzteca, 2024).

Since its inception, the series has forged dynamic partnerships with numerous civic associations and foundations dedicated to safeguarding women's integrity, advocating for marginalized communities, and combating child abuse, alongside other pertinent subjects. Additionally, each episode furnishes contact details, enabling viewers to avail themselves of

<sup>18</sup> TV Azteca is a Mexican television network known for producing a wide range of programs and for being the main competitor of Televisa in the Mexican television market.

assistance and supplementary resources tailored to the themes explored. Beyond merely highlighting the injustices and challenges women encounter in society, the series also dedicates itself to proposing solutions and avenues for transformative change. Through its portrayal of diverse perspectives and provision of actionable resources, the series endeavours to motivate viewers to actively engage with pressing social issues, catalysing a ripple effect of positive transformation.

What is remarkable about the series is its ability to address the same issue from various perspectives in different episodes. For example, the topic of suicide can be addressed, as we will see later, from the perspective of the person at risk or with suicidal behaviour, from the surviving family of suicide, and even from the point of view of the main aggressor, blamed for another person's suicide. This variety of approaches provides the opportunity to see the same issue from different angles, fostering empathy and identification with various characters, and allowing a greater understanding of the problems and possible preventive measures.

The episode titled *Has pensado en suicidarte* portrays the narrative of three high school friends confronting a myriad of challenges in their lives and pondering suicide as a potential solution to their struggles. Marichuy, one of the friends, resides in a home affected by domestic violence. Her stepfather, who struggles with alcohol, perpetrates violence towards both her and her mother. Despite Marichuy's plea for her mother to leave him, her mother justifies the situation by arguing the need to have a man to take care of the household. On the other hand, Alma, hailing from an indigenous community, experiences harassment and ridicule at school due to her ethnic background. She feels ashamed of her skin colour, economic status, and indigenous heritage. Her mother works as a domestic worker in a wealthy family, exacerbating her resentment towards white and wealthy individuals. Lastly, Nayeli has been a victim of sexual abuse, leading her to feel constant fear when she's away from home. She uses weight gain and food as protective mechanisms against men and refuses to talk about her experience out of shame, even with her mother.

When Marichuy's stepfather violently assaults her mother, she seeks help from her friends. At that moment, they realize they have never discussed their problems, not even among themselves, so they decide to seek professional help and begin attending therapy.

However, Marichuy doesn't attend the sessions because she needs to take care of her mother, who is hospitalized due to the beating she endured. Unfortunately, when her mother is discharged, she quickly finds a new boyfriend, leaving Marichuy feeling hopeless, thinking her life will never change. She decides to end her life by hanging herself. The scene is poignant, as she cries and prepares, reminiscing and mentioning the few occasions when she felt happy, intensifying the feelings of loneliness and despair. It's worth noting that the scene takes place in a house that is being sold, so those who find her are the prospective buyers visiting the house.

The episode concludes with a talk at the school about what happened with Marichuy, highlighting the risk of suicide in teenagers and the importance of paying attention to warning signs. Both parents and teenagers are urged to seek professional help and to openly discuss their problems and fears to prevent similar tragedies in the future. Although the script presents some inconsistencies and time constraints prevent an exhaustive exploration of each story, enough elements are provided to understand that, despite different problems, all the protagonists ultimately suffer from the same affliction, silence. The importance of communication and strengthening emotional bonds, especially in times of emotional difficulties, is emphasized.



Figure 21. Marychuy hangs herself, *Lo que callamos las mujeres*. Image sourced from (TVAzteca, 2001)

In the episode *Prevenir el suicidio*, from the year 2024, the devastating effects experienced by the relatives of a person who decides to take their own life are addressed. Fabiola, an 18-year-old girl, is immersed in deep depression due to the constant teasing she endures because of her overweight, which leads her to make the tragic decision to end her life.

The narrative begins with a heartbreaking scene in the morgue, where the mother embraces her daughter's body after she shot herself. The focus of the episode is on how this act leaves Fabiola's parents and brother submerged in grief and guilt. Especially, the mother feels guilty for not having detected her daughter's signs of depression and for not having been able to protect her, being held responsible for not fulfilling the caregiver role dictated by society, which brings many conflicts and arguments between the parents. Fabiola's brother also regrets not having taken his sister's comments seriously and feels responsible for having suggested the idea of suicide to her. Throughout the episode, the reasons that led Fabiola to make that decision are explored in depth, as she left no explanatory note. It is shown how the family tries to cope with the loss, but each one is immersed in their own problems, and they fail to communicate effectively.

After an attempted suicide by the brother, who tries to hang himself in his room while remembering his sister, the mother, concerned about her son's emotional state, goes to his room in time to save him. Finally, Fabiola's death ends up bringing the family together, who understand the importance of supporting each other and seeking professional help to face their internal struggles. They decide to attend therapy together, recognizing the need to openly discuss their problems and eradicate the stigma associated with mental health and suicide. The episode also highlights the importance of helplines and available resources for those struggling with depression and suicidal thoughts.

It is relevant to mention the use of visual symbolism in the episode, such as the halo of light surrounding Fabiola during the scenes where her mother confronts her, suggesting a perception of Fabiola as a celestial being beyond condemnation for her decision, especially in Catholic societies like Mexico. This symbolism humanizes Fabiola and promotes understanding and empathy towards her suffering, demystifying the stigma associated with

suicide. Although Fabiola's suicide is not shown on screen, its impact is evident through her family's pain, which serves as a powerful tool to prevent similar tragedies.



Figure 22. The body of Fabiola, marked by the bullet wound, *Lo que callamos las mujeres*. Image sourced from (TvAzteca, 2024).



Figure 23. Ruben, Fabiola's brother, attempted suicide, *Lo que callamos las mujeres*. Image sourced from (TvAzteca, 2024).

*Un minuto de silencio* explores the painful consequences of bullying through the story of Diana, a 14-year-old teenager who decides to take her own life due to constant intimidation and mockery from her classmates, Karla and Vania. After the tragic event, Karla and Vania find themselves engulfed in a whirlwind of overwhelming emotions, experiencing anguish, fear, shame, loneliness, and guilt, reflecting the same feelings that tormented Diana while

she was being bullied. The plot examines how these two teenagers are singled out as responsible for Diana's suicide, plunging them into deep remorse and self-evaluation of their past actions. The story unveils the difficult circumstances Diana faced, including her father's abandonment and persistent bullying, which plunged her into deep depression. Despite her mother's attempts to transfer her to another school to escape the bullying, Diana continued to face the same difficulties in her new environment, thus experiencing the infamous snowball effect.

The narrative underscores how bullying and lack of acceptance can have a devastating impact on a person's mental and emotional health, especially during adolescence, a particularly vulnerable stage, leading them to extreme decisions such as suicide. By focusing on Karla and Vania's experiences after Diana's suicide, the episode offers reflection on the responsibility and consequences of the bullies' actions. As the two teenagers face rejection and guilt, they are compelled to confront their own pain and examine how their internal struggles might have influenced their behaviour towards Diana. The episode highlights the importance of empathy, understanding, and self-reflection in preventing bullying, as well as in promoting a safer and more compassionate school environment. Its final message underscores the relevance of seeking professional help and learning to change attitudes to prevent future cases of bullying and their tragic consequences. Although Diana's suicide triggers the entire plot, any detailed description of the act is avoided, focusing instead on the suicide note, which expressed the need to be heard, thus highlighting the importance of opening about our internal struggles, especially in the context of mental health.



Figure 24. Diana is being harassed by Karla and Vania, *Lo que llamamos las mujeres*. Image sourced from (TvAzteca, 2014).

*Como dice el dicho* stands as another compelling television melodrama series produced by Televisa since 2011, continuing its run to the present day, with episodes accessible on Televisa's online platform. This series employs a distinctive narrative approach by linking each episode to a specific proverb, providing a unique avenue to explore diverse facets of culture and folk wisdom. Through this framework, the show imparts valuable lessons and prompts reflections relevant to daily life. With a one-hour format, each episode develops plots that intertwine with the context of a particular proverb. The main action is set in the café *El Dicho*, where Don Tomás works, an older, kind, and optimistic man known for always having wise advice for those who visit him. In every episode, the protagonist seeks guidance from Don Tomás at the café, who also shares the sayings (Las estrellas, 2024)

The series is characterized by its ability to adapt the script according to the chosen proverb for each episode. Although sometimes this may lead to some stories seeming forced due to the limitations of the proverb, the main objective is always to offer deep reflection through this resource.

In the episode *Barato es pecar y caro el enmendar*, Nicolás's life took an unexpected turn when he decided to end his relationship with his girlfriend Mayte, whose toxicity had reached unsustainable levels. In his quest for solace through his interest in Karina, Nicolás experienced a brief flash of happiness that quickly faded when Mayte, hurt by the rejection, wove a web of lies that trapped him in a spiral of misfortune.

The false accusations of abuse triggered a series of unfortunate events. Nicolás suffered not only physically, with a beating that left him with a broken finger and robbed him of his passion for the piano but also emotionally, facing the anger and hatred of those who believed Mayte's lies, including Karina.

The burden of guilt and shame became overwhelming for Nicolás, who, in a moment of desperation, decided to end his suffering through suicide. The scene shows Nicolás lying on his bed, with a bottle of pills beside him and his cellphone, while Karina listens to his final message and rushes to find him. Fortunately, she arrives in time to intervene and take him to the hospital. It is revealed that this was not Nicolás's first attempt to escape his pain, leading his mother to understand her son's sensitivity and to be more attentive. However, this idea is not fully developed due to the series' focus on proverbs, which in this episode was related to the ex-girlfriend's lie.



Figure 25. Nicolas takes pills in a suicide attempt, *Como dice el dicho*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2018).

The episode *Un caballero no tiene memoria* of the series presents a powerful plot that addresses sensitive issues related to sexual harassment and gender-based violence. The story follows the stormy journey of Gabriela, a teenager in love with Francisco, who decides to take a significant step in their relationship by having their first sexual experience during a party. However, this moment of intimacy turns into a nightmare when one of Francisco's

friends records the encounter and shares it on social media, unleashing a wave of harassment and humiliation towards Gabriela.

When her brother, Rodrigo, discovers what has happened, he tries to intervene, but ends up being brutally beaten by Francisco and his friends. Faced with this situation, Francisco feigns repentance and apologises to Gabriela, promising to take her home to talk to her. However, instead of keeping his promise, he takes her to a secluded place and rapes her, increasing her suffering and further shattering her confidence and self-esteem. Overwhelmed by the emotional burden and unbearable pain, Gabriela decides to take her own life by hanging herself in front of her house. The scene shows the moment when her brother Rodrigo finds her, generating a mixture of sadness and anger towards Francisco for his cynical attitude throughout the story.

It is important to point out that, although the script handles the story with fluidity, allowing us to understand Gabriela's emotions, sensitive issues such as harassment and gender violence should be approached with greater caution to avoid giving ideas that could endanger vulnerable people. On a positive note, the episode underlines the importance of discretion and respect in intimate relationships, warning about the devastating consequences of divulging personal or private information after sharing intimate moments. Through this plot, the series offers a profound reflection on critical issues related to gender and violence, providing a provocative look at contemporary social reality.



Figure 26. Rodrigo and his grandmother find Gabriela hanging, *Como dice el dicho*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2023)

*A la culpa sigue la disculpa* follows the story of Angel, a young asexual man facing pressure and harassment due to his sexual orientation, is narrated. The narrative highlights the lonely struggle of someone misunderstood and rejected in a world that does not recognize or accept their identity. By rejecting the advances of a girl, Angel is unfairly accused of being gay, and his life becomes a whirlwind of discrimination and mockery both at school and at home.

Trapped in an environment of machismo and prejudice, his parents not only deny him support but also shame and belittle him, refusing to accept his identity. In this hostile environment, Angel finds refuge and defence in his sister, but his suffering and emotional confusion deepen as he realizes that there is no one willing to understand or help him.

Despite seeking professional help, Angel encounters indifference and rejection from those who should be there for him. Desperation eventually overwhelms him, and he decides to take his own life at school, an act witnessed by his classmates, some shocked while others record with their cell phones. In a striking scene, Angel is shown with the rope around his neck and his sister crying, emphasizing the visual impact of his decision and the urgency to address these issues effectively.



Figure 27. Angel hangs himself in his classroom, *Como dice el dicho*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2020)



Figure 28. Angel's teacher, classmates, and sister find him dead in the classroom., *Como dice el dicho*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2020)

*La rosa de Guadalupe* is one of the most prominent programs on broadcast television, not only in Mexico but throughout Latin America, is known for its particular structure and focus. Although it does not stand out for its acting or narrative, it possesses a certain coherence and precision in the way it addresses its stories through each episode. The series, based on the concept of a miracle granted by the Virgin of Guadalupe through the appearance of a white rose, was created with the purpose of instilling hope in a society facing various problems, using a symbol widely recognized and cherished by many Mexicans.

Although the series avoids directly mentioning the Church, it clearly reflects the deep faith and devotion of the Mexican people towards the Virgin of Guadalupe. Unlike other similar productions, *La rosa de Guadalupe* focuses on happy endings, where the protagonist, upon receiving the miraculous rose, experiences a change in their destiny and acquires the ability to face any obstacle that arises.

In spite of its popularity, the content of the series is often subject to criticism due to its exaggeration, plots detached from everyday life, cardboard characters, and forced dialogues, which has led to it being ridiculed and meme by the public. However, its success persists, as is the case with many products of the cultural industry, where the producer is more interested in consumption than in quality or critique. Generally, the series is based on events of great significance, either globally or nationally, and adapts them into stories with a happy ending, albeit often exaggerated, which could easily lend itself to parody (Vanguardia, 2018).

The episode of *El club del suicidio* tells the story of four schoolmates, each dealing with their own problems, who find an unusual comfort in forming such a club as an escape from their realities. Glenda, a young woman overweight, finds herself trapped in a cycle of anxiety and shame fuelled by her mother's constant humiliation. Marisa, on the other hand, blames her mother for her father's death due to her desire for a luxurious life that led him to overwork. Nicolás, labelled as "delicate" by his family due to his sensitive nature, faces judgment and discrimination from his loved ones and at school, who wrongly assume he is gay. Finally, Felicia, a lonely and tormented soul, feels misunderstood and marginalized by her own family. They all find in the club a way to end their suffering.

One day, they finally decide on a method to end their lives, opting for brownies mixed with sleeping pills. However, in an unexpected turn, Glenda, who was responsible for preparing the brownies, confesses in the end that she did not put the pills in them, revealing her true desire to live and her bravery in stopping the plan. Regarding this episode, it is important to note that the exploration of each character's psychology is limited, as it mainly focuses on the circumstances that lead them to the Suicide Club. Additionally, when the characters discuss which method to use to end their lives and select the brownies mixed with pills as an option, there is a risk of suggesting new dangerous ways to commit suicide.

It is also relevant to note that, although the characters are willing to commit suicide, there is no real crisis or deep reflection on their problems before making the decision. The representation of the decision to end their lives in such a simplistic way could send a wrong message about the seriousness of the issue and the need to seek help in difficult situations. Although Glenda's ultimate purpose in stopping the plan is positive, the way the issue is presented from the beginning is questionable and could be misinterpreted.



Figure 29. Glenda, Marisa, Felicia, and Nicolás eating the brownies, *La rosa de Guadalupe*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2009)

The story of *Retrato de familia* shows Israel, who feels completely ignored and displaced within his own family. Trapped in the shadow of his younger sister, Israel plunges into deep loneliness and sadness. The cruelty of his girlfriend abandoning him triggers a spiral of pain in his mind, and upon finding a gun among his father's belongings, suicidal ideations become an apparent outlet for his suffering.

Israel decides to livestream his suicide attempt plan through social media, seeking to share his pain and despair with the world. But, thanks to supportive comments and pleas for him not to do it, he reconsiders his decision. The next day, a girl approaches him and offers a small spark of connection and hope amid his overwhelming loneliness.

When his parents discover the video and confront him, Israel finally finds the opportunity to express his pain and feel heard. His mother sincerely acknowledges her absence and neglect, asking for forgiveness for not being there for him. Israel starts attending therapy with a psychologist to address his deep emotional wounds and the depression consuming him.

Although the road to recovery is difficult, the intervention of his parents, his new friend, and seeking professional help are necessary steps in his healing process. However, his ex-girlfriend, unable to comprehend his pain, continues to torment him with hurtful and ruthless words, leading him to a second suicide attempt. This time, he decides to hang himself in the backyard, but his parents arrive in time to save him. This episode highlights Israel's

lack of social cohesion and demonstrates that in his attempts, what he was seeking was to feel he was not alone.



Figure 30. Israel tries to commit suicide and his father saves him., *La rosa de Guadalupe*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2018)

The series' episode *Las horas muertas* offers an in-depth exploration of the experience of Celeste, a young woman dealing with the trauma of sexual abuse as she approaches a significant milestone in her life: her *quinceañera*<sup>19</sup>.

Initially, Celeste is beaming with happiness at the prospect of her party, enjoying herself with her group of friends and excited by the presence of her friend with whom she is in love. However, the situation changes drastically when her mother reveals that she has invited her uncle to the party. What should be a cause for celebration and joy becomes a source of anguish and pain when her uncle's presence awakens painful memories of a past marked by abuse.

Throughout the plot, Celeste experiences overwhelming internal anguish as she faces fear and despair at the possibility of meeting her abuser again, especially after receiving a threatening phone call from him. This inner struggle is expressed through the suicide note Celeste writes to her mother, in which she recounts what happened in her childhood and

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<sup>19</sup> It is a traditional celebration in some Latin American countries that marks the transition of a girl into adolescence, specifically when she turns 15 years old.

reveals the depth of her suffering and the sense of emptiness that consumes her. Finally, she decides to go to the bathroom and take her own life by hanging herself.

Although the narration may feel rushed at times, this arc is used to introduce Valentina, Celeste's friend, who is going through a stressful situation during the pandemic. Her father, affected by isolation and economic uncertainty, falls into a deep depression, generating fear and concern in Valentina. At a critical moment, her father attempts suicide by consuming pills, but Valentina manages to intervene in time, and they take him to the hospital.

As the episode aired during the pandemic, it is emphasized that the importance of knowing available centres in emergency situations was mentioned when the country was in a state of crisis. Showing people where to turn in times of need.

The most notable aspect of this episode is that it presents two different realities and expressions of depression, demonstrating that no one is exempt from suffering its effects. Additionally, it underscores the crucial importance of providing appropriate attention and support during periods of emotional crisis.



Figure 31. Celeste hangs herself in her bathroom., *La rosa de Guadalupe*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2020)



Figure 32. Valentina's father tries to commit suicide by taking pills, *La rosa de Guadalupe*. Image sourced from (Televisa, 2020)

## Cinema

Since its inception, cinema has been a fascinating tool not only for interpreting reality but also for exploring events and stories across different cultures and perspectives. As Beatriz Morales-Romo (2017) eloquently expresses:

Through this powerful medium of communication, the audience can intellectually immerse themselves in other human communities, grasping the issues of contemporary men and women, perhaps like their own, in different social strata and countries. At times, cinema provides a deeper understanding of other cultures and mentalities, often distant or incomprehensible otherwise. (Morales-Romo, 2017, p. 28)

“The power of cinema lies in its ability to connect different contexts and temporalities, giving relevance to historical events and providing testimony of the unknown. Film projection offers a model of the real world, not with the intention of imitating it, but rather of offering an interpretation using all the tools of cinematic language to convey a message and give meaning to the film in the public space”. (López Cortés, 2014, p. 6)

Since its arrival, cinema has contributed, along with other media, to represent realities and reinforce stereotypes and beliefs. However, as mentioned in the Theory of Limited Effects<sup>20</sup>, the audience also has the power of discernment. Throughout the history of cinema, it has experienced multiple changes and evolutions, becoming one of the most influential means of communication, along with television and now the internet.

In Mexico, the history of cinema is divided into different stages, from the early short documentaries to the era of sound cinema and the golden age. After the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), the government of Lázaro Cárdenas implemented policies favouring the film industry as part of the effort to reclaim Mexico's cultural identity. This period was characterized by socially conscious cinema supported by nationalist policies, thus creating the golden age of Mexican cinema. During this time, Mexico became a haven for artists and filmmakers from Hollywood and Europe, who found job opportunities in the country due to the world wars ravaging their home regions.

However, Mexican cinema later declined due to the resurgence of Hollywood and other factors such as the depreciation of the Mexican peso, which increased production costs, and the advent of television. All of this contributed to a decrease in the quality of films and the waning interest of the audience in national cinema. In recent years, thanks to the emergence of new filmmakers and the quality of their productions, which have even captured the interest of Hollywood producers, Mexican cinema has been gradually resurging in public interest. Although most productions remain industrialized and with shallow plots, it can be said that Mexican cinema has shown its evolution over time through the themes addressed in the films. Currently, there are freedoms to address new themes that break with the stereotypes imposed by the so-called *época de oro* ("golden age") marking a new awakening for Mexican cinema (IberMedia Digital, 2015).

*La mujer del Puerto* (1934) stands out as one of the early sound films in Mexico. This romantic drama, directed by Arcady Boytler, nicknamed "The Russian Rooster", is based on the novel *Le Port* by the French author Guy de Maupassant. Boytler's arrival in Mexico in 1931 marked the beginning of a successful career in the country's film industry.

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<sup>20</sup> Note page 19

Set in a conservative and religious Mexico, with traditionally defined gender roles, where women had few job options, and most were underpaid due to limited rights. For example, women in Mexico did not obtain the right to vote until 1939. It was expected that the man would be the provider and the protective figure for the woman. The film addresses themes such as prostitution, incest, and suicide in a hypocritical society that stigmatized and condemned women even for men's actions.

*La mujer del Puerto* was ahead of its time in addressing these themes majestically. The story follows Rosario, a woman who, after losing her father to illness and being deceived by her boyfriend, is left destitute, tarnished in society, and without resources, forced to turn to prostitution to survive. One night, a group of sailors visits the brothel where Rosario works, and she establishes a strong connection with one of them, unaware they are brothers. Upon discovering their familial relationship the next day, Rosario feels unable to bear the shame and weight of having committed one of the worst sins, deciding to go to the port and throw herself into the sea, thus marking a tragic outcome that seemed inevitable from the beginning of the story.

With influences from silent cinema, the film narrates without falling into explicitness, highlighting the memorable performance of Andrea Palma as the protagonist. The story effectively employs new sound resources to move the audience, as evidenced in the scene where Rosario works for the first time, to the tune of the song *vendo placer* ("selling pleasure"), performed by Lina Boytler, wife of Arcady Boytler, the film's director.

The suicide scene is enhanced with background music, the sounds of the sea, and Rosario's characterization, intensifying the character's pain. Rosario's visual transformation throughout the film is remarkable, transitioning from wearing white, symbolizing her initial purity, to dressing completely in black and indulging in the vices of tobacco and alcohol, reflecting her degradation as a prostitute.

Despite addressing controversial themes, the film did not suffer censorship and proved to be a success with the audience, becoming a classic of Mexican cinema. Its impact is partly attributed to being one of the first sound films, which caused fascination at the time. Additionally, its ending, in which a woman stigmatized by society can redeem herself through death, resonated at a time when social norms severely punished figures like Rosario.

The film's great impact led to the production of two subsequent versions. The first, made in 1949, attempted to replicate the story but turned out to be a poor interpretation that soon fell into oblivion. The second version, directed by Arturo Ripstein and with a screenplay by Paz Alicia Garciadiego, offered a different adaptation of the original tale. (Yllán, 2023).

Because the original story was perceived as outdated in the new values of the 1990s, where an incestuous relationship was no longer a motive for extreme tragedy like suicide, it was decided to change the plot to a more romantic one. In this version, Perla, a woman who works in a cabaret and is prostituted by her mother, meets Marro, a sailor newly arrived in town, and they fall in love. However, Perla's mother tries to separate them at all costs, knowing they were both her children. When Marro decides to leave the city, Perla, distraught at having lost the love of her life, decides to end her life by cutting her veins and throwing herself into the sea. The notable aspect of this latest version of the film is that it was not released in Mexico due to various factors, as explained by its director. Although it was not censored, factors such as natural disasters and limited screening opportunities contributed to its absence from Mexican theatres, despite being recognized at several international festivals. Finally, the film premiered for the first time in Mexico in August 2023, in selected theatres and at the National Cinematheque. Regarding this, the director commented that present times are more conducive to this type of films that challenge social norms, as the audience is more open to seeing diverse content and questioning established conventions.



Figure 33. Rosario jumps into the sea, *La mujer del puerto*. Image sourced from (Boytlér, 1934)

*Suicídate, mi amor*, released in 1961 and starring Germán Valdéz and Tere Velázquez, two renowned actors from the golden age of Mexican cinema known for their talent in comedy, tells the story of Raúl, a wealthy rancher who is in a romantic relationship with Linda, an actress whose mother approves due to the financial benefits that Raúl represents for her daughter.

The plot takes an unexpected turn when a woman named Lucero jumps from her apartment and lands on Raúl's car. Lucero confesses that her suicide attempt was triggered by the pain of discovering that her boyfriend had betrayed her by selling her to an older man. Although she initially did not wish to die, desperation and pain led her to an impulsive act. Moved by her story, Raúl decides to help her and takes her home to recover. He convinces Lucero that not all men are the same and encourages her to stay in his home to prove it to her. Lucero agrees and begins to live with them as part of the family, under the care of Martínez, Raúl's assistant.

During her stay, Martínez notices that Lucero radiates life despite her suicide attempt, leading him to reflect on how pain can overwhelm even those who have a great love for life. Gradually, living with Raúl, Lucero begins to regain the joy of living as they both fall in love, arousing jealousy in Linda, who, feeling that she is losing Raúl's affection, fakes a suicide attempt to get his attention.

Linda embodies the archetype of the interested and manipulative woman who is willing to do anything to get what she wants, contrasting with Lucero, a hardworking, noble, and intelligent woman who possesses all the qualities of a good wife. This contrast perpetuates the gender roles established in the society of the time, as commonly seen in many films of Mexican golden cinema, which sought to reinforce cultural identity and traditional values.

Although *suicídate, mi amor* addresses the theme of suicide for love, it does so through comedy, offering a positive message about overcoming crises and discovering new reasons to live. Although the film superficially addresses mental health and presents a story that may seem fantastical, it was convincing and necessary for the time, as it addressed topics that may still be uncomfortable for many viewers today. The comedic approach helps to soften the seriousness of the subject, while the difference between Lucero's suicide attempt and Linda's highlights who was considered a suitable partner for Raúl and who was not.



Figure 34. Lucero jumps out of her apartment, *Suicidate, mi amor*. Image sourced from (Solares, 1961).

*Hasta el viento tiene miedo* a gothic horror film produced in 1968 has achieved classic status in Mexican cinema for being one of the first to explore this genre during the golden age of national cinema. Its impact was so significant that a remake was made in 2007, although many consider it failed to match the quality and atmosphere of the original. The plot follows Claudia, a student at a boarding school for young ladies, who becomes embroiled in a terrifying mystery after witnessing the apparition of a hanged woman in her room.

Doctor Oliver, upon examining Claudia, attributes her experience to a simple nervous attack due to a nightmare, while the headmistress of the boarding school, Bernarda, dismisses it as an act of manipulation. However, inexplicable events begin to occur when Claudia and her friends discover that the school's tower is open, despite being locked with a padlock. They decide to explore it and find unsettling similarities with Claudia's dreams.

The presence of the spirit of Andrea, a former student of the boarding school who committed suicide years ago, begins to manifest itself to the girls, triggering a series of supernatural events. As the story progresses, the dark secrets of the school's past and the true nature of the events surrounding Andrea's death are revealed. Intent on avenging the injustices committed in life, Andrea returns after five years and uses Claudia as an instrument of her wrath.

Tension mounts when Bernarda has a terrifying encounter with Andrea's spirit, who seeks revenge. Andrea causes Bernarda to commit suicide with a rope, adding an additional level of horror to the plot by dying in the same manner as she did. The film explores themes of injustice, revenge, and the weight of the past in a gothic and chilling atmosphere.

With a brisk pace and an immersive atmosphere, *Hasta el viento tiene miedo* portrays a story full of mystery with terrifying undertones accentuated by sounds, shadows, and the wind. Even today, it remains considered one of the best horror films ever made in Mexican cinema. It is important to note that the film uses the theme of suicide to generate terror, a common practice in horror cinema, which can reinforce the religious idea that people who commit suicide are trapped in the earthly world as punishment.



Figure 35. Claudia sees the ghost of Andrea hanging, *Hasta el viento tiene miedo*. Image sourced from (Taboada, 1968).

*Japón*<sup>21</sup> marked Carlos Reygadas's directorial debut in 2002. Recognized as one of the most controversial Mexican filmmakers due to his projects that some consider uncomfortable or boring, but always with interesting proposals, Reygadas has been both booed and awarded, even winning the Best Director award at Cannes. While Mexican critics did not receive *Japón* well, the public embraced it favourably, attending to see it in theatres.

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<sup>21</sup> It received the Camera d'Or at the 55th Cannes Film Festival; the Best Director award at the 56th Edinburgh International Film Festival, and the Best First Feature award at the 24th International Festival of New Latin American Cinema in Havana, Cuba.

This author's non-commercial work presents with naturalness the story of a man determined to end his life, who, while staying at the house of an elderly woman named Ascensión, located in abandoned ravines in the Mexican countryside, rediscovers the meaning of living. Initially, his plan was to carry out his suicide in a serene environment, where even the everyday seemed transcendental to detach from the material. However, his encounter with Ascensión and the tranquil atmosphere of the ravines gradually change his perspective, awakening senses that lay dormant.

Reygadas offers masterful storytelling through beautiful photography, long shots, rural settings, few dialogues exploring existentialist philosophy through his dramatic characters, often portrayed by non-professional actors. He challenges all conventions of commercial cinema, presenting unusual scenes such as horses having sexual relations and dead animals, as well as sexual tension between the protagonist and the elderly woman, culminating in a copulation scene.

Despite these shocking images, Reygadas manages to convey a sense of peace found in these environments, showing life as it is: raw yet beautiful. The film reveals that pleasure and motivation for living are found in the simple things that money cannot buy. The story reflects depression through a man in existential crisis, who, despite suicidal ideation and planning, gradually reconnects with his life. Although it has a dramatic focus, the film speaks about life from a different, realistic perspective, without necessarily having a happy ending.

Reygadas revealed that the inspiration for the film came from his grandfather's house, located on the edge of the canyon seen in the film. For him, this place was filled with beauty, colour, and sounds that can only be experienced after a long silence, and he wanted to share that experience with others. He believed that someone facing death must be deeply attentive to their senses. From this perspective, the film became an organic portrait of the relationship between life, death, and sensitivity.



Figure 36. He's seen with the gun, considering suicide, *Japón*. Image sourced from (Reygadas, 2002)

*5 días sin Nora*, directed and written by Mariana Chenillo, marks her directorial debut in 2009. This work was awarded the Ariel Award<sup>22</sup> for Best Picture. It is a drama with elements of black comedy that follows the story of Nora, who, before carrying out her fifteenth suicide attempt, elaborates a detailed plan for her ex-husband, José, to take charge of her funeral and prepare the Passover dinner, as dictated by the Jewish religion.

The plot begins with Nora's death after consuming three bottles of pills. The film does not show explicit scenes or dramatize the event, focusing more on the difficulties the characters face in burying Nora due to religious dogmas that disapprove of suicide. For example, the stigmatization of suicides is depicted when they try to bury Nora in a part of the cemetery reserved for criminals.

Notwithstanding the family's religiosity, with the exception of José, who is an atheist, no one judges Nora for her decision, as she had attempted suicide multiple times before. The film suggests that this might have been what Nora truly desired, given her struggle with depression from a young age. The story addresses themes of forgiveness, love, and understanding, showing how sometimes, even when one wishes to be okay, they cannot achieve it.

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<sup>22</sup> Cinematographic award granted annually by the Mexican Academy of Film Arts and Sciences (AMACC) in recognition of professionals in the Mexican film industry.

The movie includes a revealing scene where Nora and José, young, leave the hospital after Nora's period of hospitalization (Chenillo, 2009):

Nora: And Rubén?

José: At home with Fabiana.

Nora: And what did you tell him?

José: That you left as a missionary to Africa and may not come back.

Nora: Seriously.

José: What do you want me to tell him? That his mom no longer wants to live?

Nora: It's not fair that you don't understand that I really want to be okay.

José: We have a four-year-old son, Nora. If you die, he won't even remember you.

Nora: I don't do it on purpose.

José: That will be a great comfort to Rubén.

Nora: You don't understand me.

José: I understand you very well. If you want to kill yourself, do it, but not in my house or in front of my son.

Nora opens the car door and leaves.

This scene illustrates the challenges faced by individuals with mental disorders and how that affects those around them. The film, while not delving deeply into the subject, shows that it is not easy for anyone and that often there is no clear way out. Furthermore, it reminds us that we will never fully understand what a person in that situation experiences, no matter how empathetic we try to be. It addresses the topic of suicide without judgment and explores the religious perspective, offering a compassionate and thoughtful view on the subject.



Figure 37. Nora is found dead in her bed, *5 días sin Nora*. Image sourced from (Chenillo, 2009).

## **A Comparative Approach**

As we have analysed, in television and film fiction, various forms of representing suicide are employed, depending on the purpose and dramatization sought to be achieved. Additionally, clearly defined archetypes are usually observed. A comparison will now be made between the different media to highlight that, although they are all audiovisual products, they use different narrative resources.

Initially, it is important to note that both soap operas and anthology series are products intended for television and share certain elements, but they differ in their narrative focus. While soap operas, due to the length of the story, could better develop each character arc, sometimes this can be diluted among the main storyline, and the protagonist is not necessarily the one who will experience mental problems or end up committing suicide. On the contrary, in anthology series, by focusing on a single plot, it feels closer to reality, and it is easier to empathize with the main character, as the purpose is to portray social issues and raise awareness about them.

Regarding the treatment of suicide in soap operas, there is a greater dramaticism and a tendency to perpetuate stereotypes. For example, in the 5 soap operas analysed, 5 suicides of villainesses are presented as part of a dramatic resource to punish them and rid the protagonist of evil. These women share common characteristics such as envy and manipulation, and in most cases, they are obsessed with the protagonist's partner. In contrast, male suicides and suicide attempts are usually related to the stereotype of a man in love who falls from grace due to heartbreak. The methods used, mainly the use of guns, reinforce these stereotypes by adding an element of violence and drama, and reflect the reality of certain communities where the use of firearms is common. It is notable that hanging is not used, despite being the most common method in real life, probably due to its association with remorse and emotional suffering, which would not fit the profile of villains in soap operas. Instead, the act of jumping from high places is used to represent the character's desperation and lack of way out.

In contrast, anthology series presented a wide range of structures and approaches, depending on the specific program. This great flexibility allowed for better exploration and development of ideas, especially when addressing such sensitive topics, being used as

prevention tools, as in the case of *Lo que llamamos las mujeres*. However, there is also the risk of falling into absurdity or providing ideas that could generate identification in certain viewers. For this reason, it is crucial not to be too explicit, although unfortunately in most cases this was not fulfilled. These series, primarily aimed at mothers and fathers of teenagers, are essential for addressing topics that keep them alert and can prevent similar situations in their homes.

In these productions, most of the stories portrayed minors facing various forms of suffering, such as bullying derived from body shaming and sexual orientation, depression, sexual abuse, and feelings of loneliness and lack of understanding. It is important to highlight that the most used method to represent suicide in these series was hanging, which reflects reality according to data from INEGI (2023), especially considering that they are minors. This difference is notable compared to soap operas, where characters who died by violent methods were all adults.

Film offers a unique opportunity to portray realities in depth, with more advanced techniques and a budget that allows for a more authentic representation, without the need for excessive dramatization. Although it is true that archetypes are also used, these are an inherent part of culture and cultural identification. By analysing films from different eras, it is possible to observe how the approach to mental health has evolved. In the 5 films analysed, there is a trend towards a more organic and less stigmatizing approach, especially in the most recent ones. Although there were references to the church, which remains an important part of Mexican culture, a notable difference was observed between the older and newer films. In older films, society reinforced this idea, while in *5 días sin Nora*, a more recent film, while the church punished the act, the family understood and accepted it differently, showing an evolution in the perception and understanding of these issues.

Regarding gender representation in the analysed films, it is observed that predominantly it was women who committed or attempted suicide, with only one film featuring a man, whose suicide attempt led to a rediscovery of the meaning of life. On the other hand, it was shown how emotional pain led women to suicide, presenting it as a form of redemption, especially in older films, where women were mostly punished for their sins. Furthermore, in films like *Suicídate, mi amor*, from the golden age of Mexican cinema,

stereotypes of interested, capricious, and manipulative women were reinforced through the character of Linda, who was the villain and simulated a suicide. The same pattern observed in soap operas.

Regarding the methods used in cinematic representations, they were mostly diverse and adapted to the narrative purpose of each film. The scenes were more poignant and less explicit compared to other media. In the case of *Hasta el viento tiene miedo*, although a difference can be noted due to the genre of the film, the use of hanging is justified by the school environment, where this method is accessible and is used to generate a horror impact.

In the films, the causes of suicides were varied. From social pressure to mental disorders, or depression due to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and heartbreak. Although older films highlighted more sociocultural factors, showing the importance of social cohesion in Mexico years ago, this trend persists, although it is influenced by new technology, which is leading people towards a more individualistic approach.

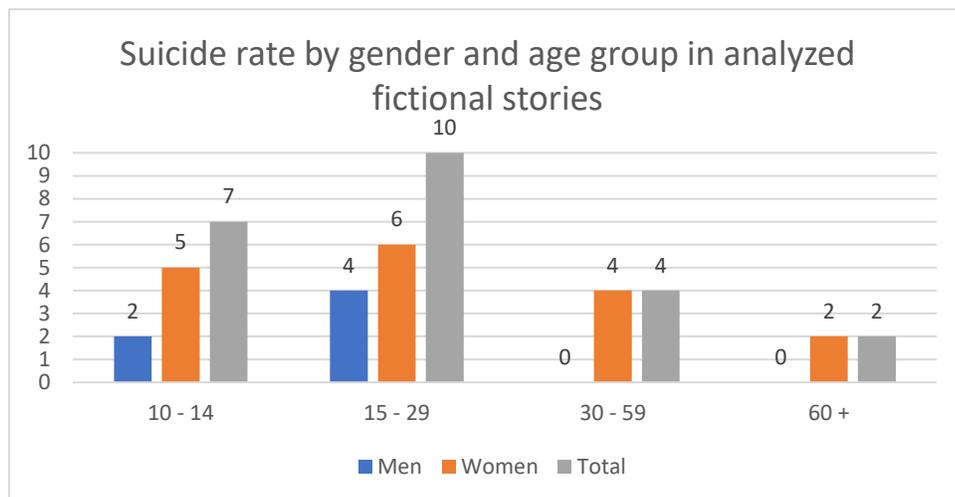


Figure 38. Suicide rate by gender and age group in analysed fictional stories. Image made by me.

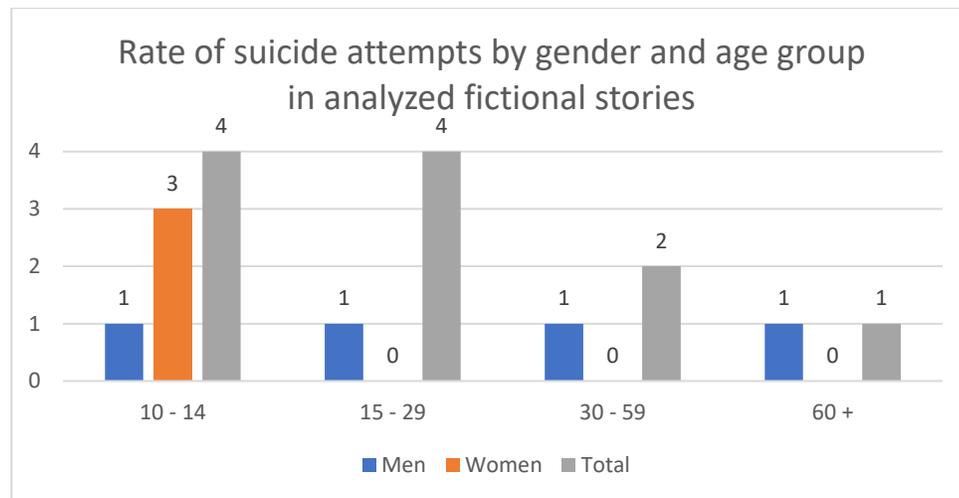


Figure 39. Rate of suicide attempts by gender and age group in analysed fictional stories Image made by me.

## Music

Exploring the influence of music in various societies unveils intriguing cases, such as the one discussed by Stack, Krysinka, and Lester (2008) concerning “Gloomy Sunday”:

In 1933, the song “Gloomy Sunday”, composed by Rezső Seress, was released. Although initially it did not have a great impact, in 1936 the song was banned after a wave of suicides reported in Hungary and worldwide. References to the song or its lyrics were found in suicide notes, the sheet music was nearby, or the song was playing on a record player. It is said that Seress composed the song after his own romantic breakup, which made it a commercial success due to its melancholic feeling and sad lyrics. It is important to highlight that for most of the 20th century, Hungary had the highest suicide rate in the world, so not everything can be attributed to a “song” (Stack, Krysinka, & Lester, 2008, p. 351)

So, can music influence a person’s suicide? This question has been the subject of study for years. Music stands out as a unique and powerful means of communication, capable of conveying emotions and feelings in an extraordinary way. Through its sounds and rhythms,

it creates a universal language that resonates deeply within our identity. It allows us to feel and connect with the songs, which influences our emotional state. That's why it is said that music is felt more intensely when we are experiencing something like the lyrics. Since time immemorial, music has reflected our history and cultural evolution, shaping our way of being and feeling.

In the context of urban tribes, music is not only a form of expression but also a marker of identity. The musical genres that each group listens to can serve as a manifestation of their culture, values, and experiences. From a sociological perspective, some musical subcultures may attract people who are at risk of suicide, as was the case with *emos*<sup>23</sup> in the 2000s, who were associated with depression, melancholy, and suicide.

In Mexico, cultural diversity is manifested in a multiplicity of musical genres, each reflecting the peculiarities of its peoples and demographic context. Traditional Mexican music, the result of a constant process of interculturality and migration, has given rise to a rich variety of popular expressions. Although speaking of traditional music in Mexico is ambitious and can be misleading due to its regional variability, genres such as mariachi have gained renown not only for their music but also for their attire and their role as cultural representation. This type of genre is very famous for songs about heartbreak and betrayal (Vega, 2010; Carvajal, 2019).

Furthermore, thanks to globalization and cultural changes, Mexicans have expanded their range of musical tastes, which now range from *reggaeton* and *trap* to *banda* and *K-pop*. Music, regardless of language, possesses a unique power to evoke emotions and convey messages, whether positive or negative. It is precisely in this latter aspect where the analysis will focus, exploring how certain song lyrics address delicate topics such as mental health and suicide.

*Café Tacvba – Cometer Suicidio* (Rangel, 1992).

Café Tacvba is a Mexican alternative rock band known for blending rock with elements of Mexican popular culture, such as the use of instruments like the *tololoche* and the *jarana*

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<sup>23</sup> Subculture

in their songs. They have been awarded Grammy and Latin Grammy Awards, standing out for their controversial lyrics and unique style.

The song *Cometer suicidio* is part of their debut album released in 1992, which managed to sell 43,000 copies in a few weeks, thus achieving a double gold record, a remarkable achievement for a debut album at that time.

The lyrics of the song are a satire about a young man in love who, due to emotional pain from being abandoned by his partner, expresses feeling nostalgic and afraid of committing suicide. Several failed attempts are mentioned, and the idea is raised that only the return of his beloved could save him.

However, the lyrics are too direct and present dangerous ideas that can be a negative influence on teenagers. Manipulating someone with the idea of committing suicide to get them to come back is neither healthy nor responsible. The title is also too direct, and these lyrics contribute to reinforcing harmful beliefs, especially in a country like Mexico, which faces serious problems such as femicide and an increase in suicide rates every year.

Can't you see I want you to save me?  
 Before I manage to commit suicide  
 Nostalgia has invaded me so many times.  
 That I'm already afraid of hurting myself  
 I tried self-immolation with Sanborn's cologne.  
 And attempted to drown myself in the toilet.  
 I've thrown myself three or four times.  
 Off a cliff and off a building  
 Can't you see I want you to save me?  
 Before I manage to commit suicide  
 And I bought a scooter to throw myself into the sea.  
 But the sea is too far away.  
 And I've taken forty Nembutals already.  
 And I only have this damn trip.

Café Tacvba should reflect on the message they convey through their songs, especially in an era where awareness of mental health and the impact of lyrics on society is increasing. It is important to note that the mention of forty Nembutal pills in the song is the same dose that Marilyn Monroe consumed when she committed suicide. Although the song is over 30 years old, it remains relevant and may be performed at their concerts. However, it is crucial to analyse its content and promote a more positive and responsible message for the sake of mental health and the well-being of the audience.

*Gloria Trevi – Lloran mis muñecas* (Trevi, 1995).

Gloria Trevi is a Mexican singer and songwriter with over thirty-five million records sold worldwide, backed by 12 gold records and 9 platinum ones. Her songs address themes of social denunciation, corruption, depression, and misogyny, which has earned her remarkable success in Mexico, the United States, and Latin America. However, her career has been marked by controversy, especially after being accused in 1998 of sexual abuse, corruption of minors, and labour exploitation, alongside her then-manager and partner, Sergio Andrade (Suárez, 2023).

This context helps us understand the controversy and stigma that has always surrounded the singer, despite being acquitted in Mexico. During the 90s, Trevi released several songs reflecting the realities of women who suffered violence, depression, or deceit from their partners. One of these songs, *Lloran mis muñecas* released in 1995 as part of the album *Si me llevas contigo* represents one of the darkest moments of her career.

The album was the least sold of her career due to the ban imposed by *Televisa*, and although *Lloran mis muñecas* was released as a single, the media decided to censor it due to its explicit reference to suicide. Although not one of the singer's most famous songs, the YouTube video has garnered 782,840 views in seven years since its release. The comments on the video are disabled. This song, and the album in general, offer an intimate look at the difficult moments Trevi went through during that time, reflecting her struggle against depression and loneliness (Terra, 2022).

My dolls cry,  
Because there is nothing left of the little girl in me  
You stole my innocence by believing in your promises.  
I can't even believe in myself anymore.  
And my dolls will only stop crying.  
When I stop thinking about you

At the beginning of the song, it could be understood as an allusion to childhood, evoked by the toy dolls that cry, representing the lost innocence upon experiencing the first time and discovering that one's partner only played with their feelings. However, as the song

progresses, the tone becomes darker and more sombre, revealing deeper layers of pain and despair.

My heart cries red rivers  
 Gradually I empty.  
 Of the blood that loved you  
 They cry, they cry.  
 My wrists cry.  
 Red threads dripping at my feet.  
 Turning into ribbons  
 Of a red shroud in which I'll sleep  
 My open wrists bleed.  
 From where the butterflies emerge  
 That formed my crazy soul.  
 That drop by drop leaves me alone.

In the end, it's evident that the reference is to the fact that she cut her wrists, and the dolls that cry are her own arms, symbolizing the shedding of blood. The confusion arises because *muñecas* in Spanish refers to both dolls and wrists. The media censorship seems justified to me, as the song addresses the topic in a too explicit and disturbing manner. Teenage girls, after losing their virginity, may feel vulnerable and more prone to similar situations, especially in the case of experiencing romantic betrayal.

*Panda – Los malaventurados no lloran* (Madero, 2007)

Panda is a Mexican alternative rock band formed in 1996, which rose to fame in the early 2000s, especially among teenage audiences, amidst the rise of the emo movement. The band was known for its metaphors and melancholic lyrics. Although the band has disbanded, the vocalist still performs solo concerts, occasionally featuring the iconic song *Los malaventurados no lloran*, released in 2006, which has become a classic of the group.

I know she's in a better place.  
 Where there is no abuse beyond this world  
 I want to find a way for me.  
 To be able to speak with her, to be able to tell her.  
 That here  
 Everything is worse.  
 That just like her  
 My will has also died.  
 I want to greet her.

Whisper in her ear  
That while I miss her, my life fades away more.

The song addresses the theme of grief and pain over the loss of a loved one. The protagonist expresses a desire to communicate with the deceased person and share their suffering, lamenting the loss of their will and the agony of missing them. Although not explicit, a feeling of depression and sadness is perceived, especially in the last phrase, where it is suggested that the protagonist's life fades away while missing their beloved. The music video for the song is particularly disturbing, as it shows several teenagers depicting different suicide attempts, from hanging to electrocution. Although it's shocking nature, the video has accumulated over 113 million views on digital platforms.

*Vicente Fernández - Por tu maldito amor* (Méndez, 1989)

Vicente Fernández, the famous Mexican ranchera singer, stood out with his distinctive mariachi suit, impeccable performance, and an unmistakable voice, becoming one of the greatest exponents of ranchera music, not only in Mexico but also in Latin America and the United States. Throughout his over 45-year career, he sold more than 65 million records and received numerous accolades, being remembered as the last great charro and an emblematic voice of Mexico. With multiple distinctions, he is considered one of the last greats of the genre (Vicente Fernández, 2024).

In 1989, he released one of his greatest hits, *Por tu maldito amor*, composed by Federico Méndez, one of his best friends. The song narrates the story of a man who suffers a painful heartbreak and goes to the extreme of wishing for death due to the intense suffering he experiences. The song gains even more depth after it became known that Méndez took his own life with a gunshot to the head after experiencing romantic rejection, which is not surprising given the emotional intensity expressed in the song (Rodríguez, 2022). *Por tu maldito amor* reflects the protagonist's inability to handle his feelings, while his soul is consumed by the pain caused by unrequited love. The final lines, filled with resignation and hopelessness, illustrate the character's profound suffering and his feeling of being buried alive by the love that consumes him.

I can't end with so much sorrow.  
 I wish to burst my veins open.  
 Because of your damn love  
 I can't sort out my feelings.  
 And my soul keeps on consuming itself.  
 Because of your damn love  
 Because of your damn love  
 And why do I even need the grave?  
 If you've already buried me.

*José Alfredo Jiménez – El Jinete* (Jiménez, 1953)

José Alfredo Jiménez, considered the greatest composer of all time in Mexico, left an invaluable legacy with over one thousand songs and being one of the greatest representatives of ranchera music, marking a golden age in the country. With international hits like *El Rey*, which many consider an anthem for Mexico, his work has transcended borders and generations. Misfortunes, heartbreaks, and life in the taverns cannot be understood without a song by José Alfredo Jiménez, whose lyrics have become emblematic standards not only of the musical genre but also of the culture throughout the country.

The song *El Jinete* premiered in 1953 and originally sung by Jorge Negrete, is a testament to José Alfredo Jiménez's talent from an early age. According to a TikTok video posted by his grandson, it is said that José Alfredo Jiménez composed the song at the age of seven, showing an unusual depth for his tender age, and revealing deep-seated stereotypes of the lovelorn man longing for death due to unrequited love (Manjarrez, 2022)

Through the distant mountain,  
 A rider goes galloping.  
 Wandering alone in the world  
 And yearning for death.  
 He carries a wound in his chest,  
 With his soul shattered,  
 He wishes to lose his life.  
 And reunite with his beloved.  
 He loved her more than his life.  
 And lost her forever,  
 That's why he carries a wound,  
 That's why he seeks death.

## News

Among all media outlets, those with the greatest responsibility regarding the Werther effect are undoubtedly news media. Although representations that may be imitative can also be found in the realm of art, literature, film, and music, previous studies have pointed out that, in addition to issues such as poor wording or inappropriate focus, exaggerated media coverage of certain events, such as the suicide of famous figures, can have a significant impact. A notable example is the case of Marilyn Monroe.

It is for this reason that the World Health Organization (WHO) has issued a series of recommendations to guide the way suicides are reported in the media. However, even though Mexico's official website has a manual based on these recommendations, many journalists do not follow it, and unfortunately, there are no significant consequences when this occurs. In the following analysis, thirty news articles from various media outlets dealing with suicide were selected. These news articles were gathered through the internet, social media, and official media company websites. The objective of the analysis was to assess, in accordance with the WHO recommendations, whether these guidelines were being followed in the way this delicate issue was being addressed.

Various types of news articles were chosen, ranging from those focused-on prevention efforts to those presenting statistical data regarding the increase in suicide rates. Additionally, reports detailing specific instances of suicide or attempted suicide were included in the selection. A comprehensive analysis was conducted based on the 16 recommendations outlined by the World Health Organization (WHO) to assess their adherence. These recommendations include avoiding sensationalized content <sup>24</sup>and refraining from using the word "suicide". Furthermore, they emphasize the importance of not providing a basic explanation of suicide or describing the methods employed. The analysis also considers the involvement of alcohol or drugs, the avoidance of glorifying the victim, and the inclusion of references to relevant mental health issues. Support and assistance hotlines are encouraged, as well as addressing the impact on family members or survivors of suicide. Specific details

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<sup>24</sup> This approach tends to prioritize capturing audiences to increase ratings. It mainly includes simplistic explanatory factors in a direct cause-effect relationship; for example, economic crisis, romantic breakups, or justifying suicide with moral values worthy of emulation such as bravery, love, dignity, honour, etc.

about individuals, such as age and gender, should be provided while avoiding unnecessary specifics. Language expressing remorse or sorrow for the act is recommended, along with refraining from displaying photographs of those who died by suicide. The public figure status of the deceased should be considered, and communication about the preventability of suicide and information on prevention methods should be included.

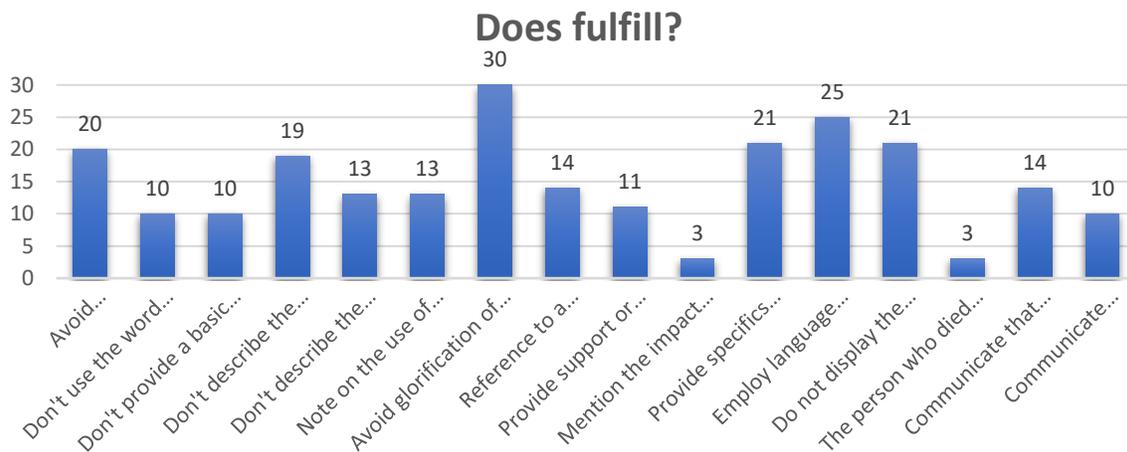


Figure 40. Criteria evaluated as recommendations by the WHO. Image made by me.

The collected data revealed that only 6 out of the 16 recommendations were on average met in the analysed news. For example, the avoidance of sensationalistic content and the omission of simplistic descriptions of suicide causes were highlighted, although in some cases, this was due to lack of detailed information. Only in 9 of the news articles were demographic details provided that went beyond gender and age, although in many cases, these details were not relevant, such as specific address or degree. Most of the news employed language expressing regret for the act and also adhered to the recommendation of not publishing photographs.

Out of the 30 analysed news articles, only 3 involved public figures, and only one of them failed to adhere to the recommended narrative care. This specific case involved a non-binary magistrate and their partner, who were found dead in circumstances initially thought to be a hate crime. However, later the Prosecutor's Office determined it was a crime of passion. The news used descriptive language, and the fact that the person was famous and

belonged to a minority group was not handled appropriately. Although it's possible that the intention of being so explicit was to recreate the scene due to speculations surrounding the case, this doesn't justify the lack of sensitivity or the failure to comply with recommended guidelines.

Example 1: According to the official's account, several bloodstains were found, along with a trail suggesting that Baena Saucedo was still alive when they descended the stairs after the argument and the knife attack. "One of the wounds, the fatal one, reached the jugular, and it's what caused the magistrate's profuse bleeding", the prosecutor said. "We think they climbed up with another knife and that they were injured in the front part of their neck, a fine, wide cut, which caused their death. Both bodies were left inches apart", said the prosecutor (Rodriguez, 2023, p. 1).

Unfortunately, one of the least used recommendations is to reference the pain felt by the family members or survivors of suicide. This aspect is crucial as it can remind people that their support network is important and that they also suffer the consequences of these acts. By highlighting the emotional impact on those left behind, greater understanding and empathy can be fostered towards those struggling with the pain of losing a loved one to suicide.

Of the 30 news articles analysed, 5 included statistical data on the increase in suicides, as well as specific reports of attempts or suicides on train tracks. Surprisingly, some of these news stories even mentioned which station these incidents occurred at, while others indicated stations where no cases had yet been reported. It is concerning that the same media outlet continued to disseminate this type of information, especially when promoting the increase in suicide rates alongside the "Saving Lives" program announced on the subway. These practices go against the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP), which state that specific methods or details of suicide should not be mentioned or publicized. An example of this is what happened in Vienna, whereby ceasing to mention the causes of suicides on the subway, suicide attempts were reduced by 80% in just six months.

A case that generated widespread coverage in both media and social networks was that of a woman who jumped from the seventh floor of a hotel. Prior to her jump, she spent about 30 minutes trying to break the window, allowing those present to record the entire incident, including the moment of the fall. A month after this incident, another man jumped from the third floor of the shopping centre adjacent to the hotel. Subsequently, months later, another individual jumped from a nearby building, this time from the 23rd floor. Although similarities in locations and methods are observed in a short period of time, there is not enough information to confidently assert the presence of a “Werther effect”. However, the coincidence between these events is noteworthy, especially considering that the video of the woman’s suicide was widely circulated and occurred in a crowded area, causing a real stir. Similarly, as in the case of the subway, reports and videos of suicide attempts by people jumping from buildings were recorded, being the second most recurrent method that appeared in the news.

Unfortunately, it was observed that the most sensationalist headlines tended to generate more views and interactions, which is understandable but concerning. What’s most regrettable is that this practice was applied to news involving the suicides of minors, where storytelling techniques were employed and the causes affecting minors were overly simplified, often portraying the situation as a mere whim.

Example 1: The boy was engrossed in a video game on his cell phone when a fight broke out with his cousins over the phone. Mauricio’s mother asked him to share the cell phone with his cousins, who also wanted to play, suggesting they take turns with the phone. However, the proposal was not accepted by the boy, who minutes later was found lifeless hanging from a beam in a shed at the back of the house (Xicoténcatl, 2023, p. 1).

Example 2: Jerick committed suicide after his stepfather scolded him for playing *Peso Pluma*’s music too loudly. Following an argument, the stepfather took away his cell phone at least to prevent him from continuing to listen to the songs. The next day, Jerick’s body was found hanging from a tree in the yard of his home in Piedras Negras, Coahuila. “*I am Peso Pluma*” read the message Jerick left for his parents before dying (Redacción AN / AG, 2023, p. 1).

Similarly, in an article reporting on the suicide of an elderly person, storytelling was employed depicting a sad “grandfather”, implying that people were more affected due to his age. The detailed account of the old man’s final moments appealed to the reader’s sadness and empathy, focusing on the man’s loneliness. It was discovered that this outlet frequently used this technique to increase views.

Example 1: According to reports, the elderly man went to a popular Tamaulipas restaurant named *La Tradicional*. When he entered and took a seat to place his order, he was served a coffee. What happened next is that the elderly person finished it and then headed to the restrooms of the mentioned restaurant. It was at that moment, when no one was watching, that he decided to take his own life. It was through a gunshot to the head that the person chose to pass into the other world amidst the shock of those present (LW, 2023).

On the contrary, it was observed that articles dealing with prevention and providing relevant information generated less traffic. In general, it’s necessary to always include, in each case, statistics and prevention methods, along with information about helplines for those who may feel identified. This is especially important when discussing public figures, as none of the three news stories involving known individuals mentioned the aforementioned.

Hanging was the most frequently described method, as all news related to children under fourteen mentioned it, as did thirteen women in prison. It can be assumed that this method is the most accessible if other resources are not available or if one is confined. Four cases involving the subway were mentioned, one with a knife, one with a gun, and there was also a reported attempt with pills.

Regarding suicide rates and attempts broken down by gender and age groups, the following graphs are presented.

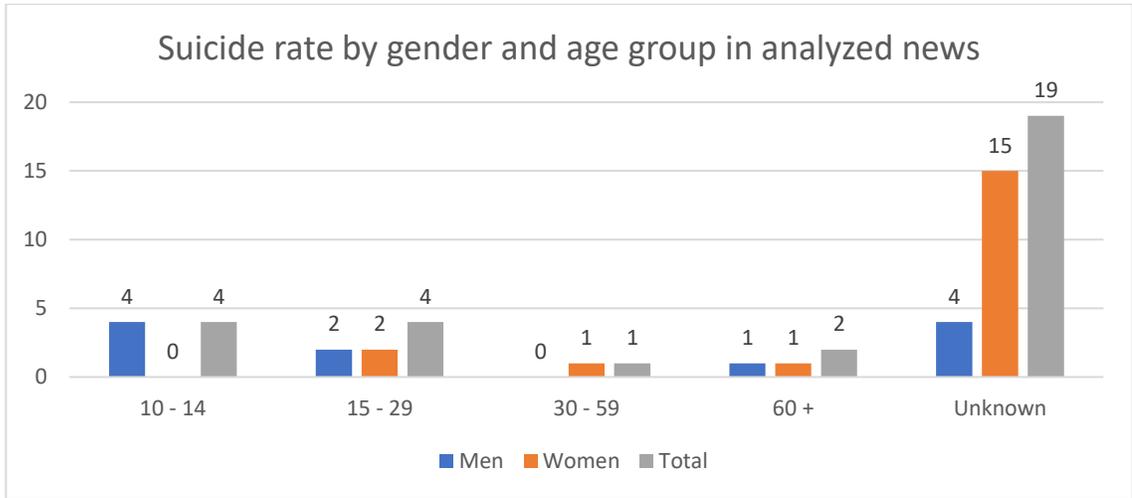


Figure 41. Suicide rate by gender and age group in analysed news. Image made by me.

It is noted that, in cases of completed suicides among minors under the age of 14, all records correspond to males. Additionally, the most frequently reported age groups are those under 29 years old, which aligns with the data provided by the INEGI (2023). On the other hand, a higher number of cases were observed in females, which may be partly attributed to a news report mentioning the suicides of 13 women (of unspecified ages) in the year 2023 in a federal prison.

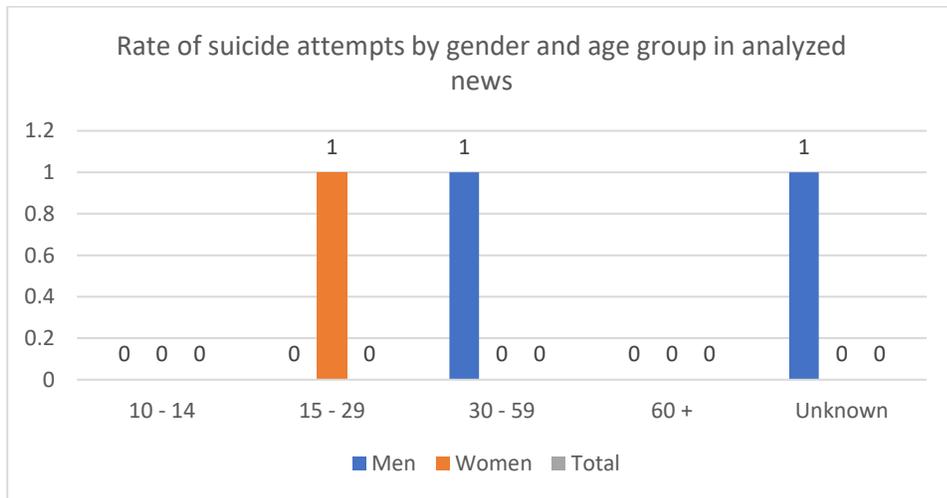


Figure 42. Rate of suicide attempts by gender and age group in analysed news. Image made by me.

Although statistically there is one suicide for every twenty attempts, representing 5% of the total, only those completed in public places, such as those mentioned, are usually reported. This is because many attempts occur in hospital settings and are not recorded. In the specific case mentioned, suicide cases were reported on a bridge, in the subway, and by pill ingestion, the latter involving a public figure.

It was also analysed whether the news mentioned sociocultural factors, and of the 30 evaluated, 12 made reference to these aspects. Among the mentions were descriptions of social inequality, diversity in sexual orientation or identity, high alcohol and substance consumption, unemployment, and both internal and external migration. In the case of minors, the pressure exerted by parents and society was highlighted, as well as the feeling of loneliness, which can result from various factors such as parental absence due to long working hours. These aspects reflect the observations made regarding sociocultural factors in Mexico, in line with Hofstede's theory.

Regarding the use of storytelling to evoke emotions, it was identified in ten of the analysed articles. Unfortunately, as mentioned earlier, this resource was especially employed in cases involving people in vulnerable situations, such as minors and the elderly, who tend to generate greater empathy. It would be beneficial to incorporate this technique into prevention articles; this way, public attention could be increased.

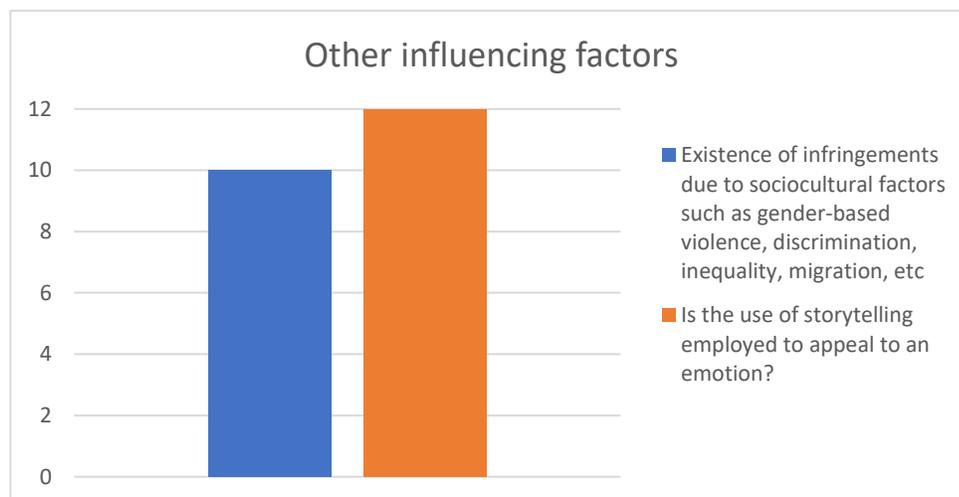


Figure 43. Other factors. Image made by me.



## Conclusions

Suicide is a multicultural phenomenon that cannot be addressed from a single perspective. However, it is important to remember that the media plays a crucial role in constructing reality and shaping personal identity. They help us understand and question our prejudices, as well as gain insights into specific issues. This research provided an analysis of the Mexican social context and various media products to answer the question: how is a suicide story narrated in Mexico? In this way, the aim was to understand how this phenomenon is perceived in the country.

Due to the way the media power is constituted in Mexico, pseudo-culture is prioritized in creating products that cater to the demands of the capitalist market, thus creating an industry that perpetuates stereotypes and prejudices. Although with technology and social media, they have had to adapt to the changing times to create more complex stories, there is still a long way to go to change a society that is still very conservative. This was especially evident with television products such as soap operas.

The analysis of fiction stories reveals that soap operas, due to their dramatic nature, resort to impactful narrative resources, such as close-ups and emotive music, to exalt emotions, especially in melodrama. In these plots, recurrent archetypes are observed: the virtuous young woman rewarded with true love, the handsome prince who overcomes obstacles for his beloved, and the villain who seeks to make life impossible for the protagonists. In the five soap operas studied, five villainesses ended up committing suicide, each for particular reasons but with common patterns: two felt trapped, two others sought to punish their mothers, and one blamed herself for not being able to face her mistakes. These women were portrayed as capricious and manipulative, with three of them obsessed with the love of the protagonist. These elements can be analysed from a gender perspective, as they reflect greater emotional instability in women. In contrast, male suicides are framed within the archetype of the man in love who takes his own life after experiencing betrayal and

rejection, perpetuating the image of the brave and romantic man willing to do anything for love. However, this representation is simplistic, especially in the case of male characters, whose suicides occur at the beginning of the plot without a complete development of their motivation, unlike women in the stories. This simplification can distort the understanding of suicide, which is often the result of various complex factors.

On the other hand, it was observed that the most used method to increase the dramatic effect was the use of a gun. This resource seems intended to intensify the emotional impact on the audience, as three of the analysed cases used this method. However, it is important to note that its use was mainly associated with a dual purpose: threatening another character before eventually shooting oneself, adding more excitement and tension.

Unlike soap operas, anthology series offer greater flexibility, enabling them to present stories perceived as more authentic. These series serve as a powerful tool to promote suicide prevention strategies. Primarily targeted at a middle-aged female audience, they address issues that resonate particularly among teenagers, who face greater risks due to their vulnerability. This is underscored by statistics indicating that teenagers are the demographic most prone to suicide. By doing so, these series have the potential to raise parental awareness and sensitize them to these pressing issues. However, regrettably, there exist series with subpar scripts that perpetuate stereotypes rather than serving as preventative measures. It is suggested that authorities contemplate implementing stricter regulations on content produced by Mexican companies, especially when tackling sensitive subjects that mirror the nation's reality, in order to forestall these programs from fostering imitative notions and behaviours.

In these series, various sociocultural factors are explored, such as school bullying, sexual orientation and diversity, social inequality, family violence, and single-mother households. The hanging method was predominantly used, especially in cases involving teenagers. Additionally, there is a balance in gender representation, with nine cases featuring male protagonists and twelve featuring female protagonists. Regarding suicide attempts, five cases were recorded among men and three among women, with the latter notably occurring in the same episode.

Moreover, cinema is presented as a medium that offers greater freedoms, allowing us to appreciate the evolution over the years and observe how society has been changing, both

in terms of narrative and beliefs. It serves as a unique opportunity to portray realities in a more authentic manner, utilizing advanced techniques and a budget that facilitates the transmission of emotions without falling into excessive drama. While it is true that archetypes are sometimes used, these are an inherent part of culture.

The five selected films span different eras to offer a varied panorama of realities and cinematic genres. The relevance of the golden age of Mexican cinema is highlighted, which has left a marked impact on cinematography, which is why most of the analysed films belong to this period. Furthermore, these works allow for the identification of recurring patterns, such as the portrayal of suicide as an act of punishment. In contrast, more recent productions present a less stigmatizing view and address the topic from various perspectives.

It is important to note that the majority of suicide cases portrayed in the films were carried out by women, with five cases of female suicide compared to just one suicide attempt by a man. Apart from the movie *Suicídame, mi amor*, where a romanticized portrayal of the topic can be perceived in a more simplistic manner, generally, the films do not idealize suicide. It is recognized that in the past, openly discussing this topic was challenging, and its portrayal in *Suicídame, mi amor* can be understood as a device to develop the plot and add comedic elements.

In all the analysed fictional stories, it was observed that the age group with the highest incidence of suicidal behaviour was between 15 and 29 years old, followed by the group aged 10 to 14 years. Regarding the most used methods, hanging ranked first, followed by the use of firearms and then by pill consumption. It is important to highlight that no man resorted to jumping as a method of suicide in the analysed plots. The main causes affecting them were poverty, heartbreak, sexual abuse, and bullying stemming from sexual diversity and overweight issues. While in the analysed news, demographic data were not always mentioned, so most were of unknown age. Among the ages mentioned, those aged 15-29 and 10-14 had the highest number of suicides. While there were 13 reported cases of suicides by men compared to 20 by women, considering that a single report spoke of an epidemic wave of cases of women committing suicide in the prison. Hence, it can be understood that there were more reports discussing cases of men.

It is essential to recognize that the media represents a significant risk of imitation, as indicated by various studies. Out of the 30 analysed news reports, only 13 did not provide details on the method used in suicide cases, underscoring the need to improve how the media addresses this issue. Among the most mentioned methods is hanging, especially among incarcerated women and minors. For example, a report from the Tabasco region detailed the case of a minor who had hanged himself, expressing concern about the increase in such acts in the area. However, it used simplistic and sensationalist language, without addressing the repercussions or providing assistance or prevention methods. This may contribute to more vulnerable individuals reading the report and adopting imitative behaviours.

The second most reported method was jumping from heights. This event was extensively covered by some media outlets, often sensationally, after a woman jumped from a hotel in a busy area, being recorded on video as it happened and quickly going viral. A month later, another man jumped from a shopping centre located next to the hotel, followed by another similar incident in a nearby building. Although there is not enough information to assert the presence of a Werther effect, the coincidence in both locations and methods in a short period is notable, underscoring the importance of media exercising greater caution in disseminating this type of content to avoid possible imitative effects. Another method that received a similar amount of coverage was attempts or suicides in the subway. Although the media report an increase in the incidence rate, the statistics still do not reflect that this is one of the most used methods. However, this situation may be due to the fact that there are still few cities in the country that have this means of transportation. Moreover, the rise in attempted or completed suicides using this method could be influenced by the extensive media coverage these cases receive.

Both in fiction and in the news, more cases of women were highlighted, despite data from INEGI indicating that the group at highest risk are men aged 15 to 29, with hanging being the most commonly used method, which coincides with what is reported in the media. However, there are notable discrepancies between media narrative and fictional stories. For example, in the news, the lack of details in the explanation hinders understanding of the causes. Although some sociocultural factors that could influence, such as bullying, isolation, social pressure, and social inequality are mentioned. It is interesting to note the lack of special

mention of domestic violence, a prevalent issue in the country. This highlights the need for media to adopt a greater gender perspective and focus on minorities to understand this phenomenon more fully.

In the specific case of music, it is difficult to measure its impact in relation to suicide. Although there have been famous songs labelled as "suicidal," in Mexico, no case has been documented where a song has had such an effect. Furthermore, with the proliferation of the internet, it is easier to explore new musical styles. "In fact, according to Spotify, the most popular genres currently include *corridos tumbados*, *pop*, and *rap*, as well as international artists" (Patiño, 2023, p. 1).

It is worth noting that ranchera songs have lost popularity compared to the past, mainly due to the lack of new exponents in this musical genre. However, heartbreak songs continue to be listened to, mainly through the genre known as Regional Mexican. The same occurs with series or movies on streaming platforms like Netflix, where controlling the impact becomes more difficult due to the wide variety of content from different countries and with diverse approaches to sensitive issues. Although global trends can be followed, such as the example of "13 Reasons Why", which was studied for its effect in the United States but was limited to a national geographic study. However, it is true that the same products can have an impact elsewhere years later.

Therefore, it is crucial that when tackling the subject of suicide in entertainment media, explicit scenes hinting at suicidal ideation must be eschewed. Moreover, causes should not be oversimplified; instead, emphasis should be placed on mental health issues, the ramifications of substance consumption, and the adoption of a gender-sensitive approach. While the factors contributing to suicide are multifaceted, it is imperative to dismantle stereotypes and present more authentic narratives that highlight the importance of support networks.

A common aspect in portrayed stories is the lack of a support network, so narratives could focus more on the importance of having a solid support system rather than solely focusing on the drama of the harsh reality that empathizes and romanticizes the suicide. This could contribute to a more comprehensive and hopeful representation of challenges related to mental health and suicide. Another suggestion for the media is that the only notes showing

the lifeline were where they showed statistical data or directly discussed prevention, but there is always a need to implement the fact that it is preventable, the risks that exist, and the support line.

Unfortunately, in Mexico, there is a significant lack of focus on the field of mental health and its associated research. This deficiency is evident in the scarcity of studies and data concerning suicide and its correlation with the media, hindering the identification of the so-called "Werther effect". Additionally, the sample size utilized in this study is limited, offering an incomplete perspective. It would be worthwhile for future research to investigate whether any fictional content has had a notable impact leading to the Werther effect in Mexican society. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to enhance the quality of data collection by relevant institutes, alongside a broader scrutiny of the media to ensure adherence to WHO recommendations. On the other hand, globalization and technological advancements have vastly expanded the accessibility of content for individuals. Consequently, attributing potential imitative effects related to suicide solely to local media would be misguided. Furthermore, we must consider the ease of generating content that becomes viral and is sensitive in nature, highlighting the need to consider policies and laws that allow for greater control over this aspect.

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